

**CONSUMERS AND THEIR BRANDS: ACTING OUT
PERSONAL MYTHOLOGIES IN A ‘GLOBAL’ BRAND
COMMUNITY**

A Ph.D. Dissertation

by

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MYTHOLOGIES IN A ‘GLOBAL’ BRAND COMMUNITY**

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of
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by

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ABSTRACT

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Brand communities have been theorized to be a crucial source for marketers to build long-term customer centered brand loyalty and a place where consumers can experience the long lost traditional community. Despite this significance consumer research is yet to study the global and the mundane aspects of the brand community concept. This research aims to fill that gap through a qualitative ethnographic study of Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey. The data is presented on two interconnected levels. Through the lived level analysis I challenge the extant literature by portraying brand community as a very heterogeneous formation where traditional community structures only formed through the everyday experiences of consumers with each other. I introduce the personal mythologies metaphor as a way in which consumers form strong emotional attachments with brands within their mundane realities. Finally, I show that brand communities travel internationally as structured set of relationships only on a believed level as a supposition in consumers’ minds. I also discuss the theoretical implications of these findings for consumer culture theory research.

Key words: Brand Community, Everyday Life, Global

ÖZET

TÜKETİCİLER VE MARKALARI: GLOBAL BİR MARKA TOPLUMUNDA KİŞİSEL MİTOLOJİLERİN OYNANMASI

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Marka toplumları hem pazarlamacılar için uzun soluklu, tüketici odaklı marka bağlılığı yaratmada önemli bir kaynak, hem de tüketiciler için uzun zamandır aradıkları geleneksel toplum ilişkilerini yaşayabilecekleri bir yer olarak düşünülmektedir. Bu önemine rağmen, tüketici araştırmaları henüz marka toplumu olgusunun global ve sıradan yönlerini araştırmamıştır. Bu araştırma bahsi geçen boşlukları doldurmak üzere Türkiye'deki Harley Davidson marka toplumu üzerine bir kalitatif etnografi çalışmasıdır. Veriler iki düzeyde incelenmektedir. Yaşanan boyuttaki analiz marka toplumunun içerisinde ne denli çeşitlilik barındırdığını ve geleneksel toplum ilişkilerinin ancak tüketicilerin günlük deneyimleri sayesinde oluştuğunu ortaya koyarak mevcut literature eleştiri getirmektedir. Çalışma kişisel mitolojiler benzetmesi ile tüketicilerin günlük hayatlarında markalar ile kurdukları güçlü, duygusal bağları açıklamaktadır. Son olarak, marka toplumlarının yapısal bir ilişkiler düzeni halinde uluslararası dolaşımının, sadece inanılan düzeyde tüketicilerin zihninde bir varsayım şeklinde gerçekleştiği gösterilmektedir. Eldeki çalışma ayrıca bu bulguların tüketici kültürü kuramları ile ilgili çıkarımlarını da tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka Toplumu, Günlük Hayat, Globalleşme

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Come than, and let us pass a leisure hour in story telling, and our story shall be the education of our heroes.

Plato, Republic, Book II

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE

Introduction

Brands have historically been the symbolic bearer of differentiation and quality in the human production process of craftworks, commodities, and services (Perry 2003). In contemporary consumer culture theory research brands and branding carry an elevated importance in the sense that they are established as not only terms, signs and symbols that define certain goods or services but also as symbolic bearers of meanings, emotions, history, and culture. Through this symbolic capacity, brands are increasingly consumed for their non-utilitarian value as consumers create and manage their personal identities and social relationships (Holt 2004). With the compression of time and space through the globalization of the world, the significance of brands as the sign system for meaning creation in consumers' everyday social lives proliferated to a degree that global brands are now considered to be one of the most powerful ideoscapes (Askegaard 2006). It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that one cannot avoid brands and their symbolic aura in the global marketplace, as not only almost

every commodity or service offered by the market is branded, but also even counterfeit products feed off from brand symbols and anti-branding movements exploit brand names and logos, such as the UnSwoosher shoe with its Anti-Logo marketed by Adbusters organization 'for kicking corporate ass.' Therefore, brands, as one of the most powerful vehicle for symbolic meaning construction and dissemination in the global consumer culture, are equally important both for marketers, as they try to make their offerings desirable and essential for consumers through building and communicating brand stories, and for consumers, as they accept, reject, or appropriate these brand stories to make sense of their mundane realities.

Brands are used by consumers not only in constructing their personal identities, but also for creating and maintaining various social relationships on a daily basis. Therefore, brands have become an essential part and parcel of what Wilk (1995) calls the 'global systems of common difference.' In this sense, brand communities are established as one of the places where brands are used to articulate these 'global systems of common differences' by bringing consumers of the same brand together in a community like structure. Brand community, as a geographically unbound community where consumers of the same brand come together based on a set of structured relationships, is celebrated by marketers as the place to enhance long-term, consumer centered brand loyalty (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002 and McAlexander, Kim, and Roberts 2003) and as an unobtrusive persuasive marketing tool for building a strong customer base (Quinn and Devasagayam 2005; Devasagayam and VanDen Heuvel 2004). It is also

regarded as the place for consumers to experience the traditional community relationships true the linking value of the brand, which was argued to be lost true the course of the evolution of consumer culture with modernity (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

The concept of brand community hence, is a critical context in which to study the role brands play in consumers' meanings and experiences as they negotiate their common differences within their own socio-cultural mundane realities in a global marketplace. However, the extant literature on brand communities has neglected both the mundane and the global.

After the introduction of the concept (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) focused on the benefits of building brand community; Schau and Muniz (2002) investigated the representations of self in a computer mediated brand community; and McAlexander et al (2003) studied the influences of community integration on brand loyalty. Furthermore, an array of research looked from a resistance perspective to consumption communities (Kozinets 2002b). Kates (2004) explored the co-creation of brand meanings in a gay community; and Belk and Tumbat (2005) examined brand communities' cultic aspects. These studies either focused on the managerial strategic issues of brand communities, or viewed them as spectacular, rebellious, and marginal experiences in the USA, thereby neglecting a global look embedded in the local everyday lived experiences of the consumers.

This research aims to shed light on these overlooked issues by looking at the consumers' meanings and practices regarding an international brand community through a focus on their lived level experiences as well as their believed level discourses in order to create a better understanding of the role of brand community in consumers' mundane realities and on the international travel of brand communities as being imported to a different socio-cultural context from its country of origin. So as to investigate these issues I have studied the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey as an imported brand community, through an ethnographic qualitative research on two interconnected levels of analysis. The lived level analysis aims to understand the importance of brand community membership for consumers in their mundane, daily experiences. What kinds of problems does brand community membership solve for consumers? What meanings do they place on their communal selves and how these meanings relate to their mundane realities? The second, believed level analysis raises the question of the global travel of brand communities. If the brand communities do travel internationally, what happens then to the meanings of community relationships in consumers' minds? How does this believed level international travel of brand community relationships relate to the lived experiences of consumers?

The analysis of the brand community concept from both a mundane, everyday perspective as well as with an international, global outlook provides the body of knowledge with important contributions. On the lived level, my research contributes to the consumer culture theory by offering personal mythologies metaphor as a significant brand relationship quality for consumers. It also

challenges the brand community literature by portraying that a brand community is not necessarily a uniform group based on a set of structured relationships; instead on the lived level a brand community might be very heterogeneous with various subcommunities and consumers form communal relationships based on compatible personal, social, and cultural qualities. Finally, this research shows that brand communities do travel internationally across borders, but only as believed communities, and they retain their local idiosyncrasies as lived communities.

The paper is organized in four main sections. The first section will introduce the reader to the scene through a literature review that traces the history of brands as a symbolic meaning system and community as a place for meaningful relationships for individuals. Then, brand community, as a place where brands and community come together, will be explained in detail and a critique of the existing studies will be provided. This section will be concluded by the presentation of the research questions that rise from the revelation that the extant literature on brand communities falls short in creating an understanding of the contemporary scene. The second section will set the stage on which the present study is conducted, by explaining the theoretical reasonings behind the choice for studying Harley Davidson brand community in the Turkish socio-cultural context, disclosing my methodological assumptions, and detailing the various data sources I have utilized for the purposes of the research. After setting the stage for the research, the next chapter will provide the results in two subsections. Act 1 will be focusing on the lived level analysis of the data, and Act 2 will be on the believed level. The results

of the research will be summarized and integrated through a negative case analysis. Final section is designed as an epilogue to the whole piece of work, by which I will provide a theoretical discussion of the results of the study together with its contributions to the existing body of knowledge in consumer culture theory research.

CHAPTER 2

THE SCENE

2.1 Branding Revisited

2.1.1 What is this thing called brand?

There are many definitions of brand, from the point of view of different stakeholders. The traditional and one of the most commonly used in branding literature is the American Marketing Association's definition of brand as a 'distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors (Aaker 1991: 7). This definition of brand as a tool of differentiation and identification refers to only one of the twelve main themes that de Chernatony and Riley (1998) came up with through their extensive research of the literature on brand definitions. Their content analysis of over one hundred articles from both trade and academic journals resulted in a categorization of the many definitions of brand in the marketing literature, as: (1) legal instrument; (2) logo; (3) company;

(4) shorthand; (5) risk reducer; (6) identity system; (7) image in consumers' minds; (8) value system; (9) personality; (10) relationship; (11) adding value; and (12) evolving entity. As a result of this literature search de Chernatony and Riley (1998) maintain that the brand is a multidimensional construct that exists in a continuous process of cyclical communication between the actions of the firm and the interpretations and redefinitions of the consumers, through which the brand is imbued with certain values and expectations.

Holt (2004) describes this continuous process of communication as the construction of a brand story. Without this history, he maintains, the markers of the brand – names, logos, and designs – are empty and the brand does not truly exist. The brand is only fully formed after these markers are filled with ideas and meanings about brand. According to Holt (2004), these ideas and meanings are authored not only by the firm and the consumers but also by the culture industries and various intermediaries such as critics and retail people.

Taken together these two views on brand concept seems to provide the most complex and encompassing definition of the brand as a multidimensional construct that exists in a continuous process of communication and authoring of values, expectations, meanings, and ideas by the firm, consumers, the culture industries, and intermediaries, which fills the otherwise empty markers of the brand with a history of consumer experiences.

2.1.2 Branding in a Historical Perspective – Yesterday

The process of branding has been around since the cavemen first painted the walls in the history of mankind. The oldest paintings in history on the walls of the Lascaux Caves in France date back to 15,000 B.C. and these bison paintings are marked also by handprints as a form of ownership declaration. The marking of craftwork with seals for ownership and quality claims was a common practice in ancient civilizations. Egyptian, Roman, Greek, and Chinese consumers knew not only who to praise and make repeat purchases from, but also who to blame if there was a problem with the product (Perry 2003).

In 1266, in order to make tax collection easier, England passed the Bakers Marking Law, which required the bakers to stamp bread loaves in order to indicate origin. This was also the time when spirit makers were required by customs and excises to burn their oak barrels of Scotch whisky with a hot iron symbol. These practices were considered to be among the first modern occurrences of commercial branding (Perry 2003). According to Aaker (1991), the term *brand* originates from these practices of using hot iron to burn marks on various products as well as live stock to identify ownership and declare quality.

Historians often pinpoint the Wedgwood & Bentley brand of luxury china in eighteenth century Britain as one of the first successful brand creations during the era of industrialization (Arvidsson 2006). Wedgwood & Bentley, with their catalogues and showrooms that are “designed to convey a sense of shopping

experience,” seemed to have foreseen the approach of contemporary brand management (Arvidsson 2006: 66). They have created a high status image around their product through a successful marketing campaign by which they constructed a link between their products and aristocracy. This brand image they have created allowed Wedgwood & Bentley to charge premium prices for their products, establishing the concept of brand as much more than just identifying the material qualities of a product (Arvidsson 2006).

After the industrial revolution altered the way of consumption by introducing mass production which made available the products that were once unavailable to masses, branding became more important as it was the only way for the consumer to differentiate between an ever increasing numbers of similar products. By the end of the nineteenth century sellers started to promote their branded products through full page advertisements in newspapers (Strasser 1989). This was the start of the communication between the firm and the consumer. Fast-forward a century and this one-way communication has become a full-fledged orchestra, whereby the authors of brand stories continuously co-create the brand, which became not only a product or service but also a vessel for constructing and maintaining self identity and social relationships (Holt 2004).

Therefore, brands and their symbolic aspects have been a part of human life since the caveman first painted the walls and they have been becoming more essential in everyday life since then. In order to better understand how brands came to be this important in consumers’ social life worlds we need to rewind the

fast-forwarded section and look closer at the symbolic aspects of consumption and brands as the essential container of these symbolic meanings.

2.1.3 Symbolic Consumption

A commodity appears, at first sight a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties....It is only by being exchanged that [commodities] acquire, as values, one uniform social status, distinct from their varied forms of existence as objects of utility.

– Karl Marx, Capital, Volume One.

Karl Marx ([1867] 1956) realized the complex nature of commodities and warned his readers about their potential to become fetish objects in a capitalist society more than a century ago. And in today's contemporary society, commodity has become even more complex than it ever was through a proliferation of what Baudrillard (1981) calls the 'sign-value.' Baudrillard (1981) claims that commodities are not merely to be characterized by use-value and exchange value, as in Marx's theory of the commodity, and that sign-value – the expression and mark of style, prestige, luxury, power, and so on – becomes an increasingly important part of the commodity and consumption. This proliferation of the sign-value, that is to say the incessant production and proliferation of signs, creates a society of simulations, which is governed by implosion and hyperreality. Kellner (1989) maintains that for Baudrillard, in the postmodern world the boundary between image or simulation and reality implodes, and with this the very experience and ground of 'the real' disappears. Henceforth, the society of simulations takes on the

appearance of 'hyperreality' which does not signify irreality or illusion, but more reality, an implosion of appearance/reality that is more real than real. This is the hyperreal condition in which models replace 'the real' through the ideal home in women's or life-style magazines, the ideal sex as portrayed in sex manuals or 'relationship' books (or pornographic movies), the ideal fashion as exemplified in advertisements or fashion shows, the ideal lifestyles as visualized in movies, and so on (Kellner 1989). Therefore, consumers in the society of simulation are offered commodities loaded with sign-value that reproduces them as the only vehicles to achieve a hyperreal ideal. According to Baudrillard consumption is discrimination and choices made to express and reinforce identity but in a world of objects that are in a simulacra; hyperreality. Hence, consumption is not only a manipulation of signs but it is just a manipulation of signs (Silverstone 1994).

Bourdieu (1984) also views consumption as a manipulation of signs. He asserts that consumption is an attempt of distinction; it is status, our claim for it, and denial of it to others. Yet, consumption for Bourdieu is not just about objects that relate to a hyperreality, but rather about objects that actually refer to a physical reality – consumption constitutes tastes, tastes in turn lifestyles, and lifestyles constitute the habitus defined by the values and practices of consumers (Silverstone 1994).

Although both philosophers view consumption as a manipulation of signs, and commodities as the vehicles of symbolic information, their views are at the

opposite ends of this same argument. While Baudrillard maintains that through the proliferation of the symbolic, consumption results in the more and more alienation of the consumers from reality; from our bodies, from others, from other people, from tradition, from communities, from nature, and so on, Bourdieu argues that the symbolic consumption is the essential tool for consumers to define and communicate their places in the lived social construction of their reality on an everyday basis. These two sides of the arguments on symbolic consumption constitute the basis of the issues of the contemporary consumer society.

Today, the symbolic aspect of consumer goods as essential in personal and social meaning construction is celebrated as the means for a liberated consumer to lead a life that is desired. There is a great deal of literature that suggests that we are what we have and that the system of meanings embedded in material possessions are used both to express a sense of self and also to communicate with others in everyday life (e.g. Belk 1988, Gabriel and Lang 1995, Douglas and Isherwood 1996, McCracken 1988). Gabriel and Lang (1995: 7) maintain that “[l]iving life to the full became increasingly synonymous with consumption.” Although consumption as a symbolic means to construct a desired social world and to avoid undesirable situations is celebrated as a liberatory moment in the contemporary society (Firat and Venkatesh 1995), it is also criticized as it simultaneously enslaves the consumer in an illusion of freedom.

Erich Fromm (1976: 76) puts it very baldly: “If I am what I have and if what I have is lost, who then am I?” According to Fromm (1976) the view that the

self and the social are constructed through an accumulation of what one has leads to enslavement of the self to those possessions. Giddens (1991) also view the symbolic consumption as an imprisonment of the self in the world of goods. “We all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so – we have no choice but to choose” (Giddens 1991: 81). The concept of choice therefore, turns out to be an illusion of freedom, where “[d]aily life becomes a sea of drowning demands, and there is no shore in sight” (Gergen 1991: 75).

In the midst of these arguments on the liberating and enslaving nature of consumption I agree with Miller (1995) that it is equally problematic to label the act of consumption as one or the other. These two instances occur simultaneously but on different levels of lived level experiences and believed level discourses. Symbolic meanings of consumption are created on these two levels as a process of objectification; an objectification of social constructions like gender, class, or ethnicity; an objectification of self like successful, modern, or masculine; an objectification of relationships like, love, friendship, or belonging (Miller 1995). Consumption as objectification through the symbolic meanings of commodities therefore, constitutes an important tool for individuals in their quest for construction of their own personal and social realities. Although the commodification of the social life on the one hand threatens to bring standardization on a believed level and hence a ‘threat of personal meaninglessness’ (Giddens 1991: 201), it nevertheless provides the individual with a vast array of resources to construct self-identities and social worlds through the symbolic meanings of consumption choices in their everyday lives.

2.1.4 Consumer Research and the Symbolic

The symbolic meanings of commodities have been a focus of consumer research since Levy's seminal article in 1959. Levy (1959) maintained that consumer is not a rational economic man as viewed by the mainstream marketing researchers and that consumption is much more than purchase behavior. According to Levy (1959: 118) "people buy things not for what they can do, but also for what they mean," both socially and personally.

Levy (1981) continued his arguments with another influential article published in 1981, where he maintained that a given act of consumption behavior can be interpreted very differently by different audiences having diverse backgrounds. Levy (1981) maintained that marketing research should allow for the development of theories that can be utilized to interpret the symbolic aspects of consumption as the fields focus should not only be buyer behavior but also consumer behavior. Solomon (1983) in this respect maintains that consumer research should focus more on what consumers do with products rather than leaving it at the purchase instance. He maintains that "[c]onsumption does not occur in a vacuum; products are integral in the fabric of social life" (Solomon 1983: 319). Schor (1999) argues that the assumptions of conventional consumer behavior research fail to describe a wide range of consumer behavior. The rational-economic model may be reasonably adequate to 'predict' such choice behavior as apples versus oranges, or milk versus orange juice, but it fails to

understand the more consequential choice behavior of consumers such as those behaviors related to products with high symbolic content (Schor 1999).

Therefore, beginning with the 1980s, there was a new, alternative consumer behavior research movement in the field that focus on consuming, rather than buying, through a qualitative sociological and anthropological approach within a multicultural socially constructed world (Belk 1995). This new consumer behavior paved the way for contemporary consumer culture theory research and the established importance of consumer goods as the conveyor of symbolic information (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

2.1.5 The Power of Brands in the Global Marketplace – Today

The symbolic meanings of consumption are transferred to brands through the accumulation of brand stories and it is often brands that consumers use as symbolic resources for constructing and maintaining their personal and social worlds (Elliot and Wattanasuvan 1998). Brands loaded with brand stories and with their identity values have become the essential vessel of self-expression for their consumers. They have also become equally important for companies through a pressing need to thrive on the basis of stories and myths as products are becoming less important than their stories (Mootee, 2003). The significance of brands as the bearer of symbolic information for both consumers and marketers

grow to be even more central for consumer culture theory research as more and more brands have become players in the globalizing marketplace.

Globalization is one of the most hotly debated phenomena of the contemporary situation and there are a lot of definitions of the concept. However, it is probably better to explain the phenomenon of globalization rather than examine the definitions of it. Appadurai (1996) explains this state of the world very expansively. Appadurai (1996) maintains that the world is not stranger to global dealings between cultures and civilizations that are socially and spatially separated throughout the history. However, these dealings were limited due to problems of time and space. But it has been understood over the past century that these problems of time and space were largely attributable to technological limitations. “For with the advent of the steamship, the automobile, the airplane, the camera, the computer, and the telephone, we have entered into an altogether new condition of neighborliness, even with those most distant from us” (Appadurai 1996: 29). Owing to these technological advancements, the process of globalization now compress time and space to an extent which results in the loss of meaning for the geographical distance – the ‘landscape’ – relative to other ‘scapes’ that are structuring the social world. Today the flow of people, ideas, money, images, and commodities through the globe occur in immense quantities and speed on a continuous basis. These global cultural flows, which Appadurai (1996) terms *ethnoscapes*, *ideoscapes*, *financescapes*, *mediascapes*, and *technoscapes* respectively, are the building blocks of the *imagined worlds* constituted by the imaginations of people around the globe. Appadurai (1996)

therefore, explains the fact of the world today as imagined by the people through these globalized cultural flows. Brands in this sense are established as one of the most important driving forces of the globalization phenomenon as they are present in all of these flows at once. Brands, not only travel globally through technoscapes, but also through people who are using them; they facilitate the flow of money in a global sense; and their symbolic meanings are disseminated in landscapes of images.

According to Askegaard (2006) the presence and importance of brands as a cultural and social institution has never been greater than it is in today's globalizing world. Brands, with their symbolic meaning universes, have become one of the most significant and powerful ideoscapes and mediascapes of the world in the globalization process with their meaning creation and dissemination role (Askegaard 2006). They are "image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (Appadurai 1996: 35).

Therefore, brands in this respect can be viewed as the vehicle of dissemination of ideas and images that communicate the symbols of self-expressions and social relationships in a global scale (Askegaard 2006). In order to portray the scale of globalization of brands in the contemporary marketscape

one can look at some of the numbers the Worldwatch Institute has published in their website.

- McDonald's operates 30,000 restaurants in 119 countries and serves 46 million customers each day. Its total revenue was \$15.4 billion in 2004. On opening day in Kuwait City, the line for the McDonald's drive-through was 10 kilometers long.
- Siemens, the German manufacturer of mobile phones, computers, medical supplies, lighting, and transportation systems employs 426,000 people and is represented in 190 countries. In 2002, Siemens net sales amounted to \$96.4 billion, of which 79% were international.
- Coca-Cola sells more than 300 drink brands in over 200 countries. More than 70% of the corporation's income originates outside the United States. Coca-Cola employs 60,000 people in Africa alone.

As a result of the essential role brands play in the globalization process they are also located at the epicenter of another debate on the implications of globalization – homogenization and fragmentation.

Globalization in the literature of consumer research often dubbed as McDonaldization, defined as the increasing integration and uniformity among the consumers as the world becomes a commercially homogeneous global network (Cornwell and Drennan 2004). “Converging tastes and preferences of consumers,

growing similarity in mass media experiences, escalating world-level communications, and increasing mobility of the world's population may seem to all point to increasing homogeneity among world peoples" (Cornwell and Drennan 2004: 110). These arguments on homogeneity bring together the issues on consumer agency. Agency can be defined as the socioculturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn 2001). The critiques of globalization's homogenizing influence grant this capacity to act only to the forces of the market and views consumers as manipulated dupes.

However, as Haug (1987: 6) argues "manipulation could only be effective if it 'somehow' latched on to the 'objective interests' of those being manipulated." It is true that consumers in the globalizing world are not free agents, but they are also not entirely socially determined products. Consumers, through changing and playing with meanings of consumption practices act in an agentic way to shape the market preferences, while simultaneously being influenced by the market themselves (Eckhardt and Mahi 2004). Therefore, the flows of globalization are not unidimensional but represent coexisting homogenizing and fragmenting forces. "Just as the global informs the local, the local informs the global. Coca-colonization is balanced with banana republicanization" (Ger and Belk 1996: 292). According to Barber (2000), as a result of this dialectic the "planet is falling precipitately apart and coming reluctantly together at the very same moment" (2000: 23). Wilk (1995) clarifies the globalization process with its homogenizing and fragmenting influences by maintaining that there is now a process of homogenization of common differences as "[w]e are not all becoming the same,

but we are portraying, dramatizing, and communicating our differences to each other in ways that are more widely intelligible” (1995: 118). Brands, with their immense omnipresence in the global marketplace and with their power of idea and image dissemination, are established as one of the most essential of these intelligible ways.

Although there is now a consensus on the symbolic information dissemination power of brands on a global scale, the debate on their role in this global homogenization and fragmentation continues. Are global brands just Trojan horses by which global marketers as cultural engineers try to conquer the local meaning creation spaces of consumers (e.g. Thompson and Arsel 2004; Holt 2002)? Or do they represent one of the most potent weapons of local meaning creation in the arsenal of consumers as they creatively appropriate, reject, or add meanings when they are consuming global brands in their local social and cultural context (e.g. Ger and Belk 1996; Firat and Venkatesh 1995)? Holt (2004), in this debate maintains that, brands with their power based on the ability of the branding paradigm to create the consumer as liberated, will always and already thrive in this dialectic relationship. Consumer agency in their response to global branding paradigm will be just that; a response, and the so-called liberated consumer is nothing but a creative opportunity for the global brands to realize new emerging principles through which they rejuvenate themselves (Holt 2002). According to Holt (2002), the discussion on homogenizing or fragmenting role of global brands is a moot point as global branding paradigm exploits both in order to proliferate in the global marketplace, and consumer agency is only a ‘market-sanctioned

cultural experiment' (2002: 89). The branding paradigm is given precedence over the consumer culture within the dialectic process of negotiation of power over the meaning system disseminated through global brands (Holt 2002). Holt (2002) maintains that the branding paradigm always and already thrives over even the most rebellious of consumers through its power to feed off the constant production of difference. He views the market as continuously on the look out for new cultural materials through which it breaks down old structures and rejuvenates itself by establishing another paradigm. In this dialectical process marketer is argued to be the locus of agency who dictates the meaning system of global brands and the local practices of consumers are viewed only as market-sanctioned experiments (Holt 2002).

Although Holt's (2002) arguments provide an insight about the macro process of a relationship between the consumer culture and the global branding paradigm, he underestimates the value of lived experiences and meaning creation moments of consumers on an everyday basis. The market may be rejuvenating itself through the cultural experimentation of consumers, but they are still moments of agentic practices on the part of consumers in their routine quest for establishing and maintaining possible selves and social relationships. The ability of the consumer to play with the meanings of global brands may be very small compared to the power of other players like the companies or the mass media on a discourses level, but it is still an important tool for the consumers' daily routines. Therefore, the debate on agency can not be fully appreciated without looking at the lived level consumer experiences.

Owing to the underestimation of the lived level instances Holt (2002) views the relationship between the branding paradigm and the consumer culture as a dialectic relationship rather than a dialogic one, where global brands, either as a homogenizing force or as creative tools of consumers to play with meanings, cause trouble for consumers through their global hegemonic power. Brands in this respect are *the* medium by which global market forces control the social life of consumers as, instead of relying on political systems or community interactions, consumers around the globe are more and more acting through consuming brands (e.g. Holt 2001; Schor 1999). And viewing the relationship between the branding paradigm and the consumer culture a dialectic process portrays global brands as the new hegemony of social life causing trouble for the consumers (Holt 2002). However, the lived level consumption instances may not be problematic as the acting out of differences via consumption may make the world a teeny bit better, a bit safer, maybe even more fair (Twitchell 2001). Twitchell refers to an article in The Wall Street Journal, which reports that the world seems, and is, relatively peaceful and provides one reason for that as the robust economies have given prospective foot soldiers something better to do – namely, go shopping. Quoting Shorris (1996) he maintains that “[i]t may be a lack of imagination on my part but I cannot conceive of a great host of people trudging across all of Europe, willing to fight and die in a crusade on behalf of the videocassette player. Nor does it seem likely to me that anyone would be willing to die on the cross for the suits of Giorgio Armani or the scents of Channel.” Therefore, consumption of global brands as the primary way of acting out in the social world may not be always a

bad thing “when you think of the role politics and religion have played in building a deep and loving relationship between peoples. Global branding paradigm may be bad for consumers trying to make sense of their social lifeworlds as it confines them in a hegemonic meaning system on a believed level, but so does a little high-altitude bombing and racial cleansing (Twitchell 2001).

Global branding has become the medium by which consumers negotiate social, cultural, political, and personal tensions in everyday life. Whether this is a good or a bad thing is a continuing debate, so is the debate on agency. These debates cannot be solved without a look on both the believed level discourses of global branding paradigm and the local lived level experiences within the consumer culture, but the fact remains that global brands are an important part and parcel of everyday lives of consumer around the world. Worldwatch Institute estimates that 1.7 billion people – more than a quarter of humanity – can be considered as being consumers, of which nearly half lives in the developing countries. It can be said that these 1.7 billion consumers are offered global brands on an everyday basis and they are left with no choice but to choose from these brands, in order to create and maintain social selves and relationships through their imbued symbolic meanings authored by consumers, corporations, cultural institutions, and various intermediaries. Therefore, the concept of brand with this essential role it plays in the global marketscape is one of the most important topics of study for consumer culture theory research and it is one of the features of the topic of this research.

2.2 Community Revisited

Askegaard (2006) maintains that branding as a communicative form institutes a new form of community practice, where brands are not only used to voice personal statements but also to create and maintain communal experiences. Brand communities are a form of these new relationship structures in the experience economy. I will now detour from the discussions on branding to provide a theoretical background on the concept of community in order to pave the way for the review of brand community literature.

2.2.1 Community in History

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

– Karl Marx

Zygmunt Bauman (2001) maintains that some words, in addition to their meanings, also have a ‘feel’ and that the word community is one of them. Whatever ‘community’ means, it nonetheless feels good. It feels good because it stands for “everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident, and trusting [...] for the kind of world which is not, regrettably available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess” (Bauman 2001: 3).

From the times when Plato defined human being as a social animal in the Republic, the concept of community has been a central concept in social sciences literature and the experiences and practices of community has gone through changes and evolutions since then. In the traditional sense, community has been defined as a socially interdependent group of people, participating together in discussions and decision making, and sharing distinct rituals and practices, those which simultaneously define the community and also are nurtured by them (Bellah 1985). In the pre-modern times community offered the individual a connection to Gods, to other community members, and to being one's self. To be left out of the community was both spiritual and physical death (Hudgins and Richards 2000). Although independence of the individual has its roots in the ancient Greek discourses – for example, Plato declares in his Republic that might is right, that the individual has the right to fight to acquire self-interest; Glaucon describes the state not as a community but rather as an agreement between self-interested individuals; and according to Epicureans individual happiness is the way to good life – for the most part it is considered to be unnatural and undesirable, and the ones who challenge the community were seen as either beasts or God (Kingdom 1992). This view of the communal society, as the only humane way of life, is argued to be transformed with the advancement of modernity.

Modernity can be described as the culture of separation (Bellah 1985), which leads to a significant change in the communitarian way of life. Many theorists claim the death of community with the advancement of modernity in the

nineteenth century and the birth of a new form of society, which is qualitatively different. Marx ([1867] 1956), Durkheim ([1893] 1933, Weber ([1922] 1978, Tonnies ([1887] 1957) all argued that an agricultural, rural, peasant, traditional, feudal society has been replaced in the Western hemisphere by an industrial, urban, white-collar, scientific, and democratic society, in which individualism is celebrated against communal values and independence against interdependence.

Ferdinand Tonnies ([1887] 1957) describes this change as a transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (roughly meaning *Community* and *Society* respectively). He maintains that the move from a pre-industrial to an industrial age transformed the communal way of life with small homogeneous communities in to societal way of life with mass heterogeneous societies. This transformation from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, according to Tonnies ([1887] 1957), was characterized by geographical mobility instead of isolation; heterogeneity of members instead of similarity; the decline of tradition; an emphasis on marital family ties rather than blood ties; a high degree of division of labor; an emphasis on achieved status rather than ascribed status; an importance on secondary relationships instead of primary relationships; and secularism rather than the sacred.

Emile Durkheim ([1893] 1933) elaborated on Tonnies' ([1887] 1957) arguments and within the characterizations of the transformation from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, he focused on the division of labor in the society. According to Durkheim ([1893] 1933) the minimal division of labor and

homogeneity is a characteristic of pre-industrial communities based on a sense of oneness, creating what he called “mechanical solidarity.” The rituals and practices of social life in this tribal communitarian way of life functioned to establish and maintain this mechanical solidarity or the sense of community. Collective consciousness, and collective representations are two important aspects of traditional societies according to Durkheim ([1912] 1995). The former functions to construct the world as knowable to the community as a whole and to create a normative social order and the latter refers to symbols that have a collective meaning, which aid members of the community to view themselves, each other, and the world. These collective representations have less importance in modern societies than in pre-industrial communities for nurturing a sense of cohesion as Tonnies’ ([1887] 1957) idea of *Gesellschaft* is characterized by secondary relationships rather than primary relationships. This type of cohesion based on secondary, instrumental relationships, brings about the anomie in social life according to Durkheim ([1893] 1933) – a feeling of discontent based on the lack of a strong cohesion in social life, the lack of a sense of belonging, and not being a member of a community (Hudgins and Richards 2000).

Durkheim’s ([1893] 1933) notion of anomie is also evident in Karl Marx’s ([1867] 1956) conceptualizations of changing economic structures as the pre-industrial community is transformed into an industrial society. Marx ([1867] 1956) maintains that the driving force of modernity was the capitalist mode of production, and that capitalism revolutionizes all social conditions, traditions, norms, values, and human relationships while searching for ways in which to

expand the market, and hence necessitates the development of what Bellah (1985) calls the culture of separation, or individualism, and the demise of community (Hudgins and Richards 2000).

Frederick Nietzsche (1983) claims that this new form of society is barbaric as it portrays an unstructured amalgamation of fragmented and competing modes, beliefs, and works. Nietzsche (1983) criticized what he saw as the characteristics of this 'barbaric' modernity; the ruthless rationalism, egoistical individualism, homogenization, and fragmentation.

Max Weber ([1922] 1978) similarly maintains that modernity marks the radical formalization and depersonalization of social relationships on a global scale. Although the project of modernity claims the purpose of establishing the sovereign, free individual, according to Weber, the modern world increasingly strips social actors of their ability to freely choose the means and ends of their behaviors (Hudgins and Richards 2000). And similar to Marx, Weber also views the market as the archetype of this modern society (Jung 2001). He maintains that the individual is caught in a capitalistic and materialistic social order; in a rationalized web of institutions to the extent that any escape route is also rationalized. In fact the contemporary social order, which Weber defines as the "iron cage of rationality," is rationalized to the point of becoming irrational (Hudgins and Richards 2000). Marx describes this irrational social order as "the mad self-enhancing circulation of capital," and resembles it to a "self-engendering

monster that pursues its path disregarding any human or environmental concern” (Zizek 1998).

What is common in all these critiques of modernity (Tönnies [1887] 1957; Durkheim [1893] 1933; Marx [1867] 1956; Weber [1922] 1978) is the argument that the transition from pre-industrial to industrial age brought together a very different social order. This does not mean that there was no form of alienation before modernity, or capitalist economic order. Indeed the individual was always already alienated by religion or political tyranny. It can also be said that communal ways of living were just another form of alienation and modernity and capitalism were responses to the constraints of community over the individual. Social life is always in a constant process of changes and transformations as political, cultural, social and economical structures evolve throughout the history. Modernity vastly changed the social structures of everyday life and although this was not the first or the last alienation of the individual it was a significant one. In the heart of all these contentions lie capitalism and the market as an impersonal social institution that causes the atomization of the individual. This view of the marketplace lays the foundation of contemporary consumer society, which Slater (1997) traces back to the same period when this new modern social order emerged.

2.2.2 Consumer Society

History is not an upward journey towards universal freedom and reciprocity, but a cyclical process in which societies move from one form of domination to another.

– Michel Foucault

Although the term consumer society, which is used to describe the contemporary state of the social order from the point of the view of the market where commodities are mass produced and mass consumed and social meanings are mainly invested in consumption behaviors, is generally used to refer to a recent phenomenon, Don Slater (1997) traces the development of consumer culture to the early modern period. This is an especially important suggestion as it establishes a relationship between the emergence of modernity and the rise of consumer society and a relationship between the loss of community and consumption. Therefore, now it is time to examine this relationship by first looking at the scene of consumer society through the eyes of its critiques.

Many early modern philosophers (e.g. Locke, Hobbes, Kant, Bentham) had an optimistic stance towards the new society emerging in the 18th century in the Western world, as it championed the free individuals who supposedly have the power to maximize their happiness and own worth through the free market economy. However, as it has been argued above, the idea that human beings are not as free as the enlightenment philosophers argued has been around since the works of thinkers like Marx, Tonnies, Weber, and Durkheim (Hudgins and Richards 2000). Furthermore, according to Zizek (1998), the Marxian critique of

capitalism is very much still valid even in today's contemporary consumer society. And just as well, Slater (1997) maintains that the consumer society of today has its roots in the early modern period, and furthermore maintains that it is the culture of consumption that played a prominent role in the making of modernity rather than the opposite. These contentions taken together create a link between consumer society and Marxian critiques of capitalist social order. Put baldly, consumer society is capitalist society (Slater 1997). And the neo-Marxian critiques are thus important for today's consumer society.

In the middle of the past century, neo-Marxist schools of thought started to develop around the idea that the post-industrial, information-based marketplace employs subtle ways to control consumers and that consumers are not so much as free as the modernity promised them to be (Hudgins and Richards 2000). If we go back in time, after the industrial revolution and the start of the assembly line mass production of consumer goods, the 1920s saw the first emergence of an affluent society, where not only consumption of goods, but also consumerism was advertised "as the shining path to modernity" (Slater 1997: 12-13). This affluent society then gave birth to the post-war consumer and the consumer boom in the 1950s. Slater (1997: 11-12) introduces this era as "a new age of conformity, of 'organization man,' of the 'other-directed' narcissist, of the mass cultural dope or couch potato keeping up with the Joneses through the mass consumption of standardized mass production goods." And thus came about the neo-Marxist critiques of this new citizen as the consumer and the new society as the society of consumption.

The term hegemony, coined by Antonio Gramsci, describes the subtle powers of symbolic systems in this consumer society. Foucault (1979) maintains that although people may think they are freer in the modern world, instead they are located in a prison (not an iron cage like Weber's but a glass one) where their every behavior would be monitored, evaluated, and shaped by the imagined 'other.' For Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the capitalist desiring machine is a perfect apparatus that uses money as a magical tool, so that it comes to be seen as the center of everything in the social order. And Foucault's (1979) guard in the tower of the panoptical system is internalized through the desire built up in the consumer as lack or need thanks to the symbolic powers of the hegemonic marketplace. Foucault explains this power within as a self-disciplining gaze. "Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he[/she] is his[/her] own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against him[/her]self. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost" (Foucault 1980: 155). It should be noted here that neither Foucault's notions of power, nor Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) view on desire are negative and repressing in and of themselves, but are represented as such through the capitalist social order. For Deleuze and Guattari (1983) desire is the ultimate positive and productive force that would liberate individuals by initiating a collective and continual becoming. And for Foucault power is positive and productive as well, as it only resides in the network of force relations that make up the whole of the society and therefore it is not exercised as a single downward vector (Owen

1994). Foucault's positive/productive notion of power suggests that power is not simply repressive. In addition to the power of the market to insist, there is always and already the power of the consumer to resist. However, the capitalist society with its weapon of fetishized commodity loaded with symbolic meanings renders desire as lack and need, and power as a repressive force. Therefore, the consumer is argued to be imprisoned in the panoptical marketplace where his/her own desire for consuming symbolic meanings stands guard, making this interiorizing panoptical system as probably one of the most efficient and effective means for the market to control the consumer society.

In spite of these neo-Marxian critiques of capitalism – and hence the consumer society – in the post-war era, the 1980s witnessed a very powerful rediscovery of consumerism, where production have become subordinated to consumption through the “triumph of the sign and the aestheticization of everyday life” (Slater 1997: 10). These neo-liberal movements in the West, especially with Reaganomics and Thatcherism, took forward the individualist discourses of modernity and instituted the new consumer society of today on the basis of a radical individualism. Kingdom (1992) refers to this new form of society as ‘masturbatory society,’ which offers a solitary view of fulfillment to the lone consumer, free from the complications of frustrating moral demand by the others. The myth (remember the Marxian and neo-Marxian critiques) of this liberation of the individual, fuelled by the free market economy, results in the breaking up and delegitimization of all forms of communal relationships inherited from the last two centuries. In this individualistic society the market has come to be seen as

much more than a medium of exchange of goods and services, it is viewed as an icon of faith, a symbolic indication of the idea that people can live without interdependence to society (Kingdom 1992).

The historical map I have tried to draw above portrays that the consumer society of today has its roots in the modern era and still retains the ills (which have been discussed above through Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Tonnies and of which the loss of community is the most important for the purposes of this research) of the transition from the pre-industrial age to modernity. Slater (1997) describes this contemporary consumer society as a society of consumption, which is universal and impersonal, which identifies freedom with private choice and private life, where the needs of consumers are infinite and insatiable, and where the privileged medium for identity negotiation is consumption.

In the last decade or so, the role of consumption in the search for individual freedom has in a way excelled even more. Technological advancements, mass communication technologies, and the globalizing forces boost the symbolic nature of consumption meanings and practices. Baudrillard (1981) takes this notion to the extreme and maintains that individuals now only consume signs instead of things. The proliferation of symbolic nature of commodities and consumption practices brought discontinuities, pluralities, chaos, instabilities, constant changes, fluidities, and paradoxes in to the lives of consumers (e.g. Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Slater (1997: 83) asserts that in the contemporary consumer society “in place of a secure order of values and social

positions there is a bewildering variety and fluidity of values, roles, authorities, symbolic resources, and social encounters.” In this disorderly world, the lone consumer is argued to be trapped within the marketplace (Denzin 2001), that which continuously offers alternatives for those who challenge or resist this hegemony (Schor and Holt 2000). The virtually unlimited market segmentation based on symbols of consumption experience is thus viewed as a form of domination over individual freedom.

Holt (2002) maintains that while most consumers fall prey to these marketing hegemonies, some try to resist and control the meanings they ascribe to their consumer behaviors. However, the meanings that are ascribed to brands proliferate so rapidly in today’s marketplace that it may not be possible for consumers to take control. Therefore, Holt (2002) argues, today not only rebellious consumers are not a threat for the market but also the market thrives on consumers like that by producing the ‘freedom’ they sought for, through a constant production of difference. Hence, the market does not liberate the individual, but rather it rejuvenates itself through the myth of the independent consumer (Holt 2002). As Bauman (2001) argues, through globalization the network of dependencies is acquiring a worldwide scope and the myth of the independent individual is turning into the reality of the dependent consumer with a ‘bottomless barrel of demands’ (Beck 1992: 23), and a ‘perpetual non-satisfaction of desire,’ whose actions are governed by the ‘will to happiness’ (Bauman 1997), which results in the sacrifice of security in the risk society (Beck 1992). This very pursuit of happiness damages and weakens the systems of

authority required for a stable life; it brings social disorder, lack of direction and consistency, and uncertainty, establishing the lives of independent individuals chaotic and insecure.

In this chaotic and insecure hegemony, in which the market demands relentless social dissolution and excessive individualization, there is also a glimpse of a reverse movement. Cova (1997) maintains that there is now a 'de-differentiation' guiding individual action. Bauman (1997) calls for a celebration of the day of the 'sweet vengeance' of what the modernity set to destroy – the community. And it is suggested that the coming era can be viewed as not crowning the triumph of individualism, but rather as the beginning of its end with the emergence of a search for the social link (Cova 1997). It is not the development of the self, but rather the development of relationships is what makes people secure from the alienating forces in today's contemporary marketplace and it is not the independence of the individual consumer that is liberating in today's contemporary society, but rather it is the interdependence on relationships (Miller 2001). This is just what Holt (2002) misses by looking at only the macro discourses level relationships between the consumer and the market where he establishes global brands as problematic for the individual consumer. However, on an everyday lived level basis individuals use the linking power of consumption in order to escape from the hegemonic and chaotic marketplace through forming and maintaining social interdependencies.

Eric Hobsbawm (1994: 428) observes that ‘men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain.’ Thus, despite the contradictory relationship between community and freedom (Bauman 2001), consumers today seem to long for social links in order to get by in contemporary marketplace and its frustrating disorder. This longing may be viewed as a tactic by the consumer to save the day on a lived level, or as another marketing strategy on a believed level to expand even more from the individual meanings and practices in to the realm of social relations. Either way consumption is now argued to be the arena through which consumers use goods for their linking value (Cova and Cova 2001); for building communities they can belong to (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001); or simply put for, the production of a ‘common’ (Hardt and Negri 2004). It is now time to look at the new forms of communities, of which lonesome individuals in the contemporary consumer society wish to be a part of in the next section.

2.2.3 Contemporary Communities of Consumer Society

Bauman (2001) defines traditional communities as ethical communities and distinguish them from contemporary communities, or from what he calls carnival communities. Where as ethical communities are associated with long-term commitments, inalienable rights and unshakeable obligations that are durable warrants of security, certainty, and safety, the carnival communities are ready-made instant communities for on the spot consumption, they are experienced there

and then, and not in the everyday routine. Religious communities (e.g. mosque or church communities) can be given as an example of ethical communities with deeply held values, long-term commitments, and strict sense of obligations. Close-knit academic circles, Free Masons, and communities formed by fellow townsmen can be seen as other examples of more traditional ethical communities. Fan clubs organized around idols like pop stars or movie stars, communities formed around prized possessions like Volkswagen clubs, and lifestyle groups such as scuba divers clubs or hiking groups, and photography communities are examples of contemporary communities, membership of which can be switched on and off by the individual members easily without any moral or emotional retribution.

Maffesoli (1996) maintains that these contemporary communities are unstable, small-scale, and affectual socialities. They are held together through shared emotions, lifestyles, new moral values, feelings of injustice, and consumption practices. Every individual today can thus be a part of several communities at the same time, in each of which s/he might play a different role with a different mask (Maffesoli 1996). Therefore, contemporary communities provide consumers with the opportunity to browse through different roles in their daily discourses.

One of the significant outcomes of modernity is the endless identity quest of the contemporary consumer, a quest in order to give meaning to their life (Cova, 1997). Jock Young (1999: 164) maintains that 'just as community

collapses, identity is invented.’ Bauman (2001) agrees with this argument and maintains that identity is the surrogate of community. ‘Neither of the two is available in our rapidly privatized and individualized, fast globalizing world; and for that reason each of them can be safely, with no fear of practical test, imagined as a cozy shelter of security and confidence, and for that reason hotly desired’ (Bauman 2001: 15-16). However, although these two are said to be replacing each other and exclusive, the contemporary state of the individual allows them to blend together. As Miller (2001) suggests, the meaning of life is not found in self-identity, but rather in the meaningfulness of relationships. And membership in contemporary communities permits on the spot, ephemeral relationships that are meaningful, in which the individual consumer can resume different identities in his/her fragmented everyday life. Therefore, whether one may refer to them as neo-tribes (Maffesoli 1996), consumption communities (Boorstin 1974), brand communities (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001), imagined communities (Anderson 1991) or carnival communities (Bauman 2001), these contemporary communities are the identity centers of postmodern consumers through which they can browse without the discomfort of being bound.

In the previous section I have portrayed brands as one of the most potent meaning creation tools for the consumer in their everyday lives in a global homogenizing and fragmenting hegemonic marketplace (e.g. Askegaard 2006; Holt 2002). Individuals in this marketplace increasingly use consumption instances for their linking value and rather than the individual identity, meaningful social relationships become the space for instantaneous, lived level liberation

from the market forces. Contemporary communities, in this context are argued to create safe homes for consumers by offering them access to a multitude of possible selves whenever they want on an everyday basis. They seem to transform community from a feared adversary of individual freedom of choice into an expression and reconfirmation of idiosyncratic independence. These two of the most important processes of today's marketplace, global brands as symbolic vehicles for meaning and contemporary communities as spaces for relationship building, are brought together under one roof with the brand community concept.

2.3 Brand Communities

Daniel Boorstin (1974) introduced the concept of consumption communities as communities created of like consumers. He maintains that a product and/or a company could create a fellowship of consumers, so that they can be a part of a community solely by consuming the same product. This contention carried the communicative function of commodities one step further as the commodity now not only communicates something about the consumer but also it enables communication with fellow consumers of the same product. According to Boorstin, "[n]o American transformation was more remarkable than these new American ways of changing things from objects of possession and envy into vehicles of community. The acts of acquiring and using had a new meaning. Nearly all objects from the hats and suits and shoes men wore to the food they ate

became symbols and instruments of novel communities” (1974: 89). Therefore, this new meaning asserted to products, enabled them to create meaningful relationships among their consumers.

Boorstin’s (1974) observation was in the wake of the New Right movements in the West, which fuelled the individualist liberation of the lone consumer, and probably because of that did not attract the attention it deserved from the marketing research field until the market realized the importance of the interpersonal relationships in individual consumer’s daily meaning creation activities. Beginning with early 1990s community relationships as a part and parcel of consumer behavior literature started to emerge (e.g. Friedman, Abeele, and Vos 1992; Arnould and Price 1993; Holt 1995).

Before the brand community concept was coined by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), the concept of subcultures of consumption was introduced to the field by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) as an analytical tool that aids a better understanding of how consumers manage their lives and identities. Their work on ‘Harley-Davidson-oriented subculture of consumption’ (1995: 44) looked at the core values of the subculture that aided the construction of a biker identity and lifestyle. Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) study paved the way for interesting and important researches on the concept and the notion of consumption subcultures turned into the notion of marketplace communities (McAlexander et al. 2002) or brand communities (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). This shift in the conceptualization was mainly due to the fact that subcultures are defined as

subordinate or inferior to a parent culture and as being somewhat marginal and deviant in the sense that they represent a breakaway from the conventional, parent culture; they represent a noise (e.g. Hebdige 1979). However, brand communities do not need to have a marginal oppositional role within the surrounding culture (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). On the contrary, communities may be viewed as the glue holding the society together (Bauman 2001).

Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) work extended Boorstin's consumption communities to focus on branded communities. They introduced the idea of brand community as 'a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand' (2001: 412). The point of departure of their argument is based on the opposition between Tonnies' ([1887] 1957) concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which is marked by modernity that has arguably dislocated and disconnected community and replaced it with a mechanical, contractual, individualistic, rational, and urban society. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) maintain that consumption plays a significant role in this alleged loss of community fuelled with mass media and marketing and they view brands as a symbol of this turn to consumer society, therefore having a central role in the discussions of community versus society. Branded goods replaced the unmarked commodities and together with mass advertising fed the materialistic desires of the individual consumer. However, they argue that these branded goods nowadays give rise to communities that they themselves once helped diminish (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). This contention is important for community literature as it calls for a contradiction. While critics of modernity and

consumer society blame the marketing of branded commodities for the loss of community¹, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) embrace these same brands and their meanings for the construction of communities.

The concept of brand community takes the dyadic brand loyalty and relationship marketing concepts forward so as to bring the other consumer in the equation. Looking at consumers' involvement with brands through an interpersonal relationship theoretic point of view has become increasingly acceptable in the consumer research literature (Fournier 2005). A relationship is comprised of a succession of continual exchanges between two parties known to each other. These exchanges do not occur in a vacuum and they both affect and are affected by the social contexts they are embedded in (Fournier 1998). Fournier (1998) introduced the relationship theory to consumer research in order to better understand consumers' dealings with brands within their everyday routines. Brands in this respect are considered to be an active partner in the relationship process with human like qualities. Consumers establish relationships with certain brands which add meaning to their daily lives. These meanings range from utilitarian and functional to more emotional and psychological benefits and they all bear significance for the people who are engaging in these brand relationships (Fournier 1998).

Whereas in the relationship marketing the emphasis is on the relationship between the individual customer and branded goods and services (Fournier 1998),

¹ See the discussions on Marxian and Neo-Marxian critiques of capitalism and the market in the consumer society.

brand community concept brings into this relationship the other consumers. McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) expand this triangular view (consumer – brand – consumer) and propose a multifaceted network of relationships between the product, the brand, the marketer, and their customers, which is built around consumer experiences, as the basis of brand communities. They argue that the marketer and the consumer build brand community jointly, and the negotiation and creation of meaning is always shared. This view presents another noteworthy issue for consumer behavior research as it brings into discussions the notion of locus of agency.

For Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), although brand communities are largely imagined communities, and although they are facilitated and more importantly fashioned by mass media, and although they are centered around a commercially mass marketed brand, they still symbolize emotional and mutual bonds that exist between consumers, who have been viewed as individualistic, materialistic, dupes at the hands of the corporations by so many contemporary critics. Like Fournier's (1998) active consumer, they also assert some agency to the consumer. Against the pessimistic views of Holt (2002) on brands that are causing trouble for the consumer through the hegemonic, all encompassing market meanings and practices, which does not permit any rebelling or liberating consumer agency, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) maintain that in today's consumer society there still exist communities of the past through which consumers construct their own shared meanings and practices.

Yet, how much these communities are the result of exploitation by corporations is another question. Perhaps the answer lies in Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) assertion that for legitimacy of community membership the brand has to be appreciated for the 'right reasons.' The right reasons are underlined by the full appreciation of the culture, history, traditions, rituals, and symbols of the community. But then, who dictates the 'right reason' remains an enigma: the community, the brand managers, or each and every individual consumer. Therefore, the 'right' reason, or the 'right' way is established as a very important facet of the brand community construct as it both creates and is created by the brand community, implying the power of the marketer and the consumer respectively. However, although the consumers belonging to a brand community are willing to blur the boundaries between the marketer and themselves, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) admit that it is the marketer who acts as a spokesperson for the consumers most of the time, thus dictating the 'right way.' Like Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) implicit assertion, McAlexander et al. (2002: 42) explicitly deploy agency to the marketer for building brand communities by taking up "an active role in establishing the shared rituals, traditions, and meanings that foster consciousness of kind." These arguments on the agency over brand community meanings and practices, just as Holt's (2002) view on brands, present an oversight of the lived experiences of consumers. The locus of agency plays a crucial role in brand community relationships as it determines whether the meanings and practices of relationships within a brand community are tactics of the consumers or they represent another encompassing scheme of the contemporary marketing

forces. This debate can not be resolved without a closer study of brand community grounded in the everyday mundane lives of consumers.

The agency issue is, therefore, very fundamental for brand community defined as a place where the community values of the pre-industrial society can be experienced by consumers of the same brand. If the agency in determining the right way of social relationships is with the marketer than it becomes just another modus operandi of marketing on a believed level rather than a genuine community created and maintained by the social relationships of participants. However, if the brand community as “an actor capable of collective action” can tilt the agency scale in favor of the consumers on the lived level, then the hegemonic market forces may have met with an equal adversary (Cova and Cova 2002: 600). Either way, brand community concept with its reference to two of the most important vehicles for consumers to make sense of their social lives – brands as the sign system that travels globally and contemporary communities that offer identity and belonging anchors – is established to be a fertile context for consumer culture theory researchers.

The extant literature on the brand community concept is fairly limited compared to its importance in the international consumer research field. After Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) coined the concept, there have been a number of researches on brand communities. An array of research looked at brand community from only a managerial perspective without considering the value of brand community from consumers’ point of view. McAlexander, Schouten, and

Koenig (2002) focused on the benefits of building brand community for the marketer as 'the Holy grail of brand loyalty' (2002: 38). They have focused on two brands, Jeep and Harley-Davidson through both qualitative and quantitative studies and presented brandfests as a way in which companies can build brand communities for long-term customer-centered brand relationships. McAlexander, Kim and Roberts (2003), furthered this study to look at the influences of satisfaction and brand community integration on customer loyalty. McAlexander and his colleagues define brand community integration as the collective of relationships of consumers with the product itself, the brand, the company and the fellow consumers. The results of their survey suggest that brand community integration has a positive effect on both customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Lastly, Quinn and Devasagayam (2005) researched the strategic implications for building brand community to reach ethnic minorities in the United States.

Another array of research looked at the brand community concept from a cyberspace perspective, focusing only on on-line communities. Although these studies bring the consumers' perspective on brand communities into discussion they neglected the lived experiences of consumers in favor of simulated experiences in the cyberspace. Schau and Muniz (2002) investigated the representations of self in a computer mediated brand community. They have researched consumer web pages devoted to five different brands in order to understand the tensions between community identity and the ways in which individual identity is negotiated, represented, and communicated in cyberspace through the brand community membership. Devasagayam and Van Den Heuvel

(2004) offered in their research the use of Weblogs as an inexpensive yet effective tool for building virtual brand communities.

Furthermore, another array of research looked from a marginal perspective to consumption communities. These studies, although emphasizing the lived experiences of consumers, viewed brand community concept only as spectacular, rebellious, and marginal experiences. Kozinets (2001 and 2002b) looked at the Star Trek and the Burning Man communities to understand consumers' meaning creation process that they use to distance themselves from the market commercialization. Kates (2004) explored the co-creation of brand meanings in a gay community; and Belk and Tumbat (2005) examined brand communities' cultic aspects through their study on Macintosh brand community.

Global brands are one of the most important mediums for consumers to create meanings in their everyday lives. They are carriers of symbolic meaning on a believed level globally as well as tools for symbolic meaning on the lived level local experiences. Contemporary communities are also established as an essential place for maintaining meaningful relationships in the contemporary consumer society, which can otherwise be chaotic and threatening for the lonely individual. In spite of the value of global brands and contemporary communities for consumers in negotiating their possible selves and social relationships within their mundane daily social lives, the extant literature on brand community has yet to study neither the global nor the mundane aspects of the concept. Brand community is argued to be a geographically unbound place on the one hand for marketers to bring about long term consumer loyalty, and on the other hand for

consumers to experience re-traditional communal relationships. These arguments can not be fully understood without a look at the global existence of brand communities and their role in consumers' local lived experiences.

2.4 So What?

The research on brand communities lack on the one hand the relationship between brand community membership and the mundane, everyday lives of consumers, and on the other hand it neglects the global, international travel of brand communities and the implications of this travel on the local consumers of the global village. The previous discussions on global brands and contemporary communities showed that brand community, through an integration of both of these mediums, represents one of the most potent vehicles for consumers to make sense of their local everyday lived world in a globalizing marketplace. The purpose of this research is to tackle these neglected aspects of brand community in order to establish its argued importance in both local experiences and global discourses and consequently to discuss the whereabouts of the locus of agency during the construction of these experiences and discourses.

In order to study these neglected issues my research focuses on two interconnected levels of analysis – a lived level analysis and a believed level analysis. The need for a separate and yet interconnected levels of analysis emerged as the research revealed contradicting instances between the lived

meanings and experiences of consumers and their believed constructs about the global brand community they belong to. The lived level analysis investigates the dynamics of relationship between the brand (market), the brand community member (consumer), and the community member's everyday life (culture). The research question I am addressing is, what types of problems in consumers' everyday lives are solved by brand community membership and how? Here I am focusing on the ways in which community members manage their everyday possible selves together with their communal selves, by looking at the meanings they place on their communal selves and how these relate to their everyday routines, meanings, and practices. Through these questions I aim to understand the importance of brand community membership for consumers in their mundane, daily experiences. The other, believed level analysis offers an international look at the brand community concept and investigates the global travel of brand communities, which is also neglected by the extant literature. Do brand communities travel internationally is the main question I ask. How do they travel? What happens to the meanings of community relationships? Through these questions I will be able to place the brand community concept in a global consumptionscape and discuss the implications of this believed level global branding paradigm for the lived experiences of consumers as well as for the consumer culture theory.

CHAPTER 3

STAGING THE RESEARCH

In this part of the dissertation I will discuss the methodological issues that frame the fieldwork that has been undertaken to conduct this research. I have conducted in-depth interviews with Harley riders and Harley Davidson executives and participant observations in two national HOG activities. I have further triangulated the data through supporting my fieldwork with literary sources and media coverage of HOG and Harley Davidson in various nationwide newspapers. The following sections will explicate the reasons for the choice of studying Harley Davidson brand community in the Turkish consumer context, the methodological assumptions I have as a researcher, and the data sources I have utilized for this research respectively.

3.1 Harley Davidson Brand Community in Turkey

An imported brand community that has been established elsewhere provides a germane theoretical context in which to study the local lived

experiences of consumers and their beliefs on the global brand community. For this theoretical purpose I have chosen to study Harley Davidson brand community as one of the largest worldwide brand communities, which has a presence in all of the continents with more than 900,000 members. The local context in which to study Harley Davidson community as an imported global brand community will be Turkey. Let me first talk about the theoretical reasonings behind the choice for Turkey as the local culture to conduct the study in before going onto discuss the reasonings for choosing Harley Davidson as the specific international brand community.

The choice for Turkey as a stage for this research has several underpinnings. The most obvious of these reasons is to provide a qualitatively different perspective on brand community research from a non-Western state. Up until now, the extant literature on brand community research has been conducted in the United States (e.g. Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, McAlexander et al. 2002, Schau and Muniz 2002). The notion of a communal existence around a brand is discussed by these researchers as a distinctive turning point in a relatively individualistic society, which has been losing its communal characteristics through the era of modernity and capitalism. Therefore the brand community is conceptualized as a place where a nostalgic need for communal belonging is experienced by the consumers. However, although modernization had a global feature that affected all existing societies, this happened in an uneven degree, time, and space (Jung 2001). This has led to multiple modernities through the "continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs"

(Eisenstadt 2000: 1-2). Therefore, a monocultural perspective to theoretical knowledge accumulation would lead to a restricted knowledge of the wide array of human behavior (Markus and Kitayama 1991). The world is constructed, framed, and signified in multiple ways; and these multiple ways should be analyzed in order to create different conceptual understandings of the world.

Turkey in this respect is a very important site for research as it is not just a non-Western state, but also a state in transition. Turkey is a transitional state in a geographical sense, as it is literally a bridge between the East and the West. But more importantly it is a state in transition in the economical, social, and cultural sense as well. It has been going through this transition period since early 1980s from a state dominated capitalism to a liberal free market economy, which is accompanied by an increasing embrace of western world both socio-culturally and economically (Ger, Belk, and Lascu 1993). Therefore, being in this transition period, Turkey still holds onto traditional values and practices together with fairly new ones brought in by modernity. As Best and Kellner (1997) suggest, this transition state is important for it enables an understanding of connections between the past and the novelties of the present and future. According to Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç (2000) the efforts of creating a modern nation-state in Turkey, which breaks up all its ties with the cultural, traditional, historical, economical, and political past, have failed. And today Turkish consumers experience simultaneously two cultures, one, which is 'modern' with individualistic values, and another that is 'traditional,' which values communal, familial ties, simultaneously not only within the same society, but also within

themselves. This continual paradox in the Turkish society resembles the tensions of an aspirational community (Mazzarella 2003), where consumers idealize global, universal images and have to negotiate these believed meanings with their everyday lived experiences ad infinitum. Turkish context in this sense has the potential to provide rich data for the two interconnected levels of analysis of my research – the lived and believed levels. Brand communities in the West are said to be creating communal bonds in a highly individualized society, but what do they offer to consumers in a culture, which still *lives* according to strong traditional values and at the same time holds *beliefs* that stem from a relatively new global consumer ethos?

In this transitional society, there exists a few brand communities – e.g. a radio network community; a community of housewives established by a detergent brand; and a newspaper brand community to name some – among which, Harley Davidson brand community is the most visible one through high media coverage of their various activities. I have chosen Harley Davidson brand community as the place for the fieldwork for various theoretical reasons. Most importantly, Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is an ‘imported’ brand community that has been established abroad. Harley Davidson brand community was founded in the United States and has been exported from there to various countries on every continent around the globe. Therefore, it constitutes a potential to offer rich data for the study of brand communities that travel globally. Furthermore, there were a number of studies conducted on Harley Davidson brand community in the West, which can provide me with a point of comparison on an international level (e.g.

McAlexander et al 1995 and Schouten and McAlexander 2002). More importantly, Harley Davidson as an iconic American brand, with its patriotic, free-spirited, rugged, and masculine images, constitutes sharp contrasts with the communal, patriarchal Turkish culture. Therefore, the choice for Harley Davidson mirrors, if not proliferates, the tensions of a transitional society on the brand community level and thus, provides a rich context to study dynamics between global communal meanings and everyday local practices of consumers.

3.2 Methodology

I have conducted my research on this stage of Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey, but before going on and explain how, I would like to briefly discuss my ontological and epistemological lineage in order to clarify the choice of this method of data collection. Considering myself to be an interpretive consumer researcher, I do not entertain the idea that there is an objective reality out there that I am expected to uncover. Instead, I believe that there are multiple realities constructed through social interactions among various agents in a historical context. My research is essentially based on the simple question: What is going on here? For answering such a question “[h]ypotheses, measurement, samples, and instruments are the wrong guidelines” (Agar 1986: 12). Such handling of the question would be unproductive as it lacks penetration, and does not say enough about the meanings of the experiences of the consumer (Levy 1981). Qualitative methods, on the other hand permit the evaluation of issues in

more depth and detail than quantitative techniques (Patton 1990). Therefore, in order to penetrate deeper into the lived experiences of Harley-Davidson brand community members, to co-create the meanings they ascribe their social worlds, I conducted an ethnographic qualitative research. Ethnographic qualitative research entails a systematic analysis of human behavior in natural settings that are embedded in the intended socio-cultural contexts; an extended, experiential participation in the field of observation, a credible interpretation of the behaviors, meanings, and experiences of persons under study, and the utilization of multiple sources of data. One of these multiple sources of data I have utilized is in-depth interviews. In-depth interview method is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative research armory, with its ability to allow the researcher to peer into the mental worlds of the individuals and its capacity to provide an understanding of their own categories and logic by which they experience their daily lifeworlds (McCracken 1988). In addition to the in-depth interviews, I have also conducted participant observation on two separate occasions, which allowed me to examine the practices of the Harley Davidson brand community in an unobtrusive fashion. Participant observation aids the researcher in understanding the particular context within which individuals give meaning to their experiences. While in-depth interviews try to understand respondents' own accounts regarding these experiences, participant observation opens up a window into their actual actions. In this sense in-depth interviews and participant observation are considered to be the central techniques of naturalistic qualitative research with their mutuality in collecting comprehensive data in a particular context (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Lastly, I have made use of secondary data sources from the Internet as well as

print media. These secondary data sources allow the researcher to supplement the primary data by expanding the understanding of the relevant context. Collecting secondary supplementing data is argued to be an essential part of naturalistic qualitative enquiry as it complements the words and actions of respondents and provides a triangulation that creates a more trustworthy interpretation by the researcher (Maxwell 1996).

3.2.1 In-depth Interviews

One of these multiple data sources I have utilized was in-depth interviews with Harley Davidson riders and Harley Davidson dealers. These in-depth interviews allowed me to understand the interviewees' own meanings about their experiences with Harley-Davidson brand community. I have conducted interviews with 28 Harley Davidson riders (see Table 1). Two of these riders were also the CEO and general manager of the Harley Davidson dealer in Turkey, Efsane Motor.

Sample

The interviewees were recruited through theoretical sampling in order to collect data from an array of community members who are as diverse as possible to attain a heterogeneous sample. My sample included male and female Harley

riders from both Istanbul and Ankara, with an age spread from 31 to 67. There were new members, and the very first members, and members who are in the board of directors of “*Harley Sahipleri Derneği*” (Harley Owners Association, which is a legal NGO established by HOG Turkey). Furthermore, I tried to include members with varying degrees of enthusiasm towards the brand and community, and members from different fractions within the community, such as men who like to ride alone, with other men, or together with their wives and families. One of the reasons for this variety seeking is to assess the idea that these diverse consumers might have different everyday possible selves which would imply different modes of relationship with the brand and the community. Another reason is to include as much variance as possible in order to paint a better picture of the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey so as to place it in an international context.

The interviews were conducted in respondents’ offices whenever possible and on average lasted between one and one and a half hour. In a couple of occasions the interviews were cut short at 45 minutes and a couple of them lasted over two and a half hours, depending on the degree of talkativeness of the interviewees. They are all tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. A comprehensive analysis of cultural meanings and experiences of individuals require both emic perspectives of the respondents and an etic construction of theoretical understandings by the researcher. Therefore, the verbatim transcriptions of interviews are used to analyze the data with first an emic perspective so that the respondents own cultural meanings and experiences

concerning the brand community and their relationships with the brand and the community would be the basis of the interpretation. These emic perspectives were brought together with the data from other sources in a holistic manner and the interviews were revisited over and over again in order to provide insightful and comprehensive understandings with an etic perspective. This analysis of the data that flows from an emic perspective to building of etic understandings serves the purposes of this research which is to make theoretical claims that contribute to the understandings of a global marketplace based on the local meanings and experiences of consumers.

3.2.2 Participant Observation

During the period of my research HOG Turkey organized the very first national rally in Turkey. I have attended this 1st National Harley Owners Group Rally as well as the 2nd one that took place in Istanbul, one year apart from each other, as an official HOG member. I had my “HOG Member” arm band and t-shirt, and I have worked as one of the volunteers in the organizing committee. These Rallies took place over a three day period and include concerts, contests, city tours, and various shows. They start early in the morning and last through out the day until dawn, in a venue called ‘Park Orman,’ which is located in a wooded area with a pool, and various restaurants and bars scattered around. In both of these Rallies there were foreign Harley Davidson riders from all around the world as well – such as the United States, Canada, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Finland,

Scotland, and so on. My work as a volunteer HOG member during these Rallies were to sign in the guests as they arrive and also to check from time to time their needs and make sure everything was in order, which allowed me to mingle with the Harley riders easily and facilitated casual conversations about the organization.

Participant observation as one of the major data collection methods of ethnography provides an access to the complex behavioral details of consumption; to the backstage areas where consumption behaviors are rehearsed and performances scripted (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Whereas in-depth interviews allowed verbal reports based on the informant's emotions, experiences, meanings, and expectations, which are then "relied on to provide emic perspectives of action: people's value-laden stories and accounts of their own and others' behaviors" (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994: 490), the participant observation in these rallies opened a window in to the actual rituals and practices of the community and to the social interactions between members.

3.2.3 Secondary Data Sources

I have also collected data from Internet sources, from Harley Davidson corporation web pages, HOG Turkey's website and forum archives, from various other motorcycle clubs' sites in Turkey, and HOG websites of some USA chapters. Kozinets (2002a) coined this form of data collection as netnography,

which he defines as ethnography on the Internet. Netnography is an unobtrusive as well as a naturalistic method of data collection from online communities and cultures through computer mediated platforms. I have acquired a user name and password that allowed me access to member only forum archives of HOG Turkey. These data sources provided me with an opportunity to make some comparisons between US and Turkish HOG chapters' management, activities, and interactions and also between HOG and other motorcycle communities.

The final data sources I have utilized for my research were national newspapers in Turkey. I conducted research in 3 national newspapers' archives (a center-right newspaper Sabah; a center-left newspaper Radikal, and an Islamist newspaper Zaman) for news articles related with Harley-Davidson community in a three year period from January 2003 to January 2006. These articles included interviews with HOG members, news about their activities, and also magazine articles related with Harley-Davidson community members. These newspaper pieces allowed me to examine Harley-Davidson brand community in Turkey through the looking glass of the national media.

3.3 Analysis of the Data

All of these data sources are analyzed with a holistic approach in order to move from emic perspectives of respondents to make etic interpretations of the Harley Davidson brand community's meanings and experiences in Turkish

context. I have worked back and forth between these data sources, in order to seek out inconsistencies, differences, and commonalities, and I have dissected every bit of information to create a fuller understanding.

I can explain the analysis process in two categories: a secondary analysis and a primary analysis. The secondary analysis started with my first involvement with the topic. I have started to collect data from various media sources and together with the extant literature this data both paved the way for designing the research and also it helped me to shape and reshape the primary data collection and analysis.

The primary analysis started with the open coding of the data from the verbatim transcripts of the in-depth interviews. This open coding of the data required the careful deep reading of each interview transcript separately without making any premature assumptions about the interconnectedness of codes. After the free coding of each interview I have then looked for themes emerging out of these codes. The themes then were analyzed in order to find any commonalities, or contradictions within each interview. It was at this stage that I have realized that there are contradicting themes in each interview regarding what the respondent believes in and how s/he lives. These themes then were examined across interviews. At this stage I have also started the iterative process of going back and forth between the theoretical literature and the data. Interrelationships between themes were identified and then some of the redundant themes were eliminated. Together with the theory and in light of my research questions I

organized the themes hierarchically and while establishing three themes as chief points of the study I have also eliminated some themes as redundant. The next stage in this primary analysis involved the abstraction of theses from the data. Together with the literature, secondary sources, and observations I have interpreted the emic themes from respondents into etic theses for building a theoretical understanding from the data.

A final analysis step was for me the writing up stage of the findings. The writing up stage allowed me to critically reflect on my interpretations of the data as a researcher. The writing stage was also important as it was in this stage where I have also discussed the initial writings with fellow researchers and had the opportunity to evaluate the inherent researcher bias and found new perspectives to construct a wholesome theoretical understanding. The process of writing and rewriting and rewriting allowed me to critique myself as a researcher as well as to fine tune the contributions of my research.

My approach in this study was never to uncover a generalizable objective truth, but rather to report a robust interpretation of a triangulated data in order to portray a trustworthy picture of the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey; by providing an answer as to what kind of everyday problems this brand community membership resolves for consumers and how, and also by placing it in the global consumptionscape through explaining the ways in which the Harley Davidson brand community has traveled to Turkey. In the next chapter, I will be

discussing the findings from these data sources that will lead the way to portray such a picture.

Table 1. Interviewee Profiles

Name	Age	Occupation	Sex
Toygar	31	Efsane Motor General Manager	M
Burhan	36	Travel Agency Owner	M
Ahmet	38	Translation Agency Owner	M
Metin	38	Stock Broker	M
Sevin	39	Coffee House Chain Owner	F
Engin	40	Software Company Owner	M
Remzi	40	Chemical Factory Owner	M
Kaan	41	Coffee House Chain Owner	M
Gamze	44	Housewife	F
Talat	44	Construction Firm Owner	M
Gizem	44	Textile	F
Murat	44	Textile	M
Harun	46	Factory Owner	M
Emin	50	Mining Firm Owner	M
Mansur	53	Leather Goods Designer	M
Faruk	54	Medical Supplier Firm Owner	M
Fevzi	55	Efsane Motor CEO	M
Ziya	56	Athletics Club and Restaurant Owner	M
Mesut	56	Real Estate	M
Aygun	56	Export – Import	M
Yaman	57	Distribution Firm Owner	M
Turgay	58	Manufacturing Firm Owner	M
Atay	60	Professor / Firm Owner	M
Semih	60	Media Relations Firm Owner	M
Aslan	62	Holding Company Owner	M
Erhan	63	Construction Firm Owner	M
Ferhat	65	Holding Company Owner	M
Vahit	67	Consultant	M

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter I will first talk about the launching story of the first and only Harley Davidson dealership in Turkey. Then I will discuss the Harley Owners Group (HOG) organization and the establishment of the Harley Owners Association (HOA), a legal non-governmental organization founded by the HOG members in Turkey. This section will continue, after explaining the relationships between the dealer and HOG (or HOA),² with the different categories, or as I term them, the subcommunities within the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey. I will conclude the lived level analysis with the discussion on the personal mythologies of Turkish Harley riders, and how these personal mythologies are acted through the brand community membership. The final section in this chapter will discuss the believed level analysis of the data, where I will show how the Harley Davidson brand community members in Turkey believe, on the contrary to what they live through, that there is a universal brand community among the

² Respondents use the acronym HOG for their community, unless they would like to explicitly differentiate between the two. Therefore, from here on I will do the same and only refer to the community as HOA wherever necessary.

Harley Davidson owners around the globe. This chapter will be followed by the theoretical implications emanating from these two lived and believed levels of analysis of the data.

4.1 ACT 1: Lived Level Analysis

4.1.1 Harley Davidson and HOG in Turkey

Harley organization in Turkey is a fairly new organization, which started in 1996 when the first and only dealer, Efsane Motor, opened up in Istanbul. The story of Efsane (Legend) has also a legendary story for the owners. The CEO of Efsane Motor maintains that Harley was a fantasy object for him until recently.

“Harley was a fantasy object for me actually. I mean it was like Superman. I like and read Superman, but Superman does not actually exist. There was something called Harley, but it did not exist for me, because I did not see one ever. I do not recall seeing one in those days” (Fevzi).

Fevzi draws parallels between Harley Davidson and comic book super heroes, a fantastic object with ‘out of this world’ attributes like Superman from Krypton. This fantasy status of Harley, he mentions, was also evident in Turkish consumers in 1990 when a grooming company conducted a research on Harley brand awareness.

“I think it was early 1990 when L’Oreal brought Harley Davidson aftershaves and stuff to Turkey. And they conducted a survey beforehand. There is a question in the survey: What comes to your mind when you think about motorcycles? Answers have every brand from Kawasaki to Kanuni, but no Harley. They are stunned; they are going to import Harley aftershave, and they think nobody knows Harley. They decide to conduct another survey and ask about Harley. From this survey Harley comes out as a fantasy object. Something like “What is Harley? It is not real” comes out, interesting. I also had something like that.”

The realization that Harley is actually something real and attainable strikes him during a visit to the United States when his friend’s cousin came to meet them on a Harley bike.

“Someone I know is on a Harley. The ‘hey this is not a fantasy, this is real’ thing hit me there actually. I liked it very much.”

Then he starts riding a Honda, which was in his words “fully Harleyized” (*Harleyleştirilmiş* – which means turned into a Harley) and during a visit to England, he and two of his friends bought their first Harley Davidson motorcycles and brought them to Turkey. After a year or so he starts writing to Harley headquarters in Europe for complaints about lack of technical service in Turkey, and suggests them to open up a dealership here, only to receive letters of regret that maintains the Turkish market is not large enough for opening up a dealership and advise them to go to Thessaloniki, Greece for maintenance and parts.

“Then one day, after a year later than our last correspondence I received a letter. I think it was 1996. It says something like we would like to get information about the motorcycle market in Turkey, do you have any data? I immediately called them saying that I received a letter, what is going on. And they said, we decided to enter Turkey, we feel that there is an interest;

in order to justify this feeling we need data. I said well I am not in this sector so why, and they said we received a letter from you; it was sitting in the file, about the need for technical service. Then there was an excitement among us. Well this is interesting, shall we, and so on. Thirteen friends we established something and made a presentation. Luck.”

So in 1996 Efsane Motor was established as the Harley Davidson dealer in Turkey, as a holding company with thirteen partners. The fantasy has become a reality through sheer luck, the legend goes. Together with Efsane, Harley Owners Group (HOG) organization has started in Turkey. Now there are about 800 Harley motorcycles in Turkey and HOG chapters are active in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir.

However, these HOG chapters are different than the counterparts in the United States and elsewhere in the world. The more active Harley riders, in 2002 established the Harley Owners Association (Harley Sahipleri Derneği), an official NGO in Turkey. One of the main reasons for establishing the Harley Owners Association was to organize the activities of the group under a more institutionalized roof. Although in other parts of the world HOG chapters are sponsored and managed by the Harley dealer of the region, in Turkey most of the activities are funded by the association (HOA) through yearly dues paid by the members and also through outside sponsors. HOA is managed by the board of directors elected by the members on a yearly basis. HOA also aims to lead other motorcycle clubs in order to lobby for changing traffic laws in Turkey, which they think lack emphasis on motorcycle regulations and safety.

“When we are organizing these activities, I said we shouldn’t be seen as a vagabond, gang like group. Why? You are going to take initiatives about traffic laws. Why would the governor accept you – a bunch of bikers out on the streets? I mean he wouldn’t see you. Or, while you are the brain team who can manage this work, another group of adolescent kids meet the governor just because their name is association. Those kids are young, inexperienced, we have accumulation, knowledge accumulation. In order to reflect this accumulation you have to have an appellation, you have to be a legal entity, hence there has to be an association” (Semih).

Semih maintains that Harley owners, most of them being experienced business men and women have the necessary skills and familiarity with government policy makings, yet they lacked the institutional power to make their voice heard through the bureaucratic channels as they did not have a legal status. So they founded the HOA. The institutional power of HOA is also acknowledged by the president of the Turkish Motorcycle Federation. He maintains that “the organization and communication power of HOG has the capacity to illuminate the whole motorcycle community” (Harleyci, November/December 2003, p.34). From here on I will use the acronym HOG for the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey as the respondents also refer to their organization as HOG instead of HOA – unless they would like to specifically differentiate between them.

The HOG organization in Turkey is an invaluable asset for Efsane Motor maintains the general manager.

“We advertise ourselves indirectly by using HOG, through activities. Therefore, an important amount of our advertising, or marketing budget goes to HOG activities, to rallies, national rallies, other short trips.... We

will allocate less to advertisement and more to activities. Because the impact of activities is much better than advertising” (Togay).

The reason for this better impact according to Togay comes from the fact that HOG is

“A fabulous opportunity, marketing medium comprised of brand addicted, brand passionate people. Because every minute they move around wearing Harley Davidson clothes, shoes, with their bikes. Moreover, as if this isn’t enough, they organize a festival for us, and as if that is not enough, they publish a magazine. No one can find a better opportunity I guess.”

Although Efsane Motor feels that HOG is this fabulous marketing tool for them to exploit to the fullest, HOG members maintain that this role of HOG does not coincide with the Harley spirit and that they are independent of Efsane and if it comes to it they have the power to stand up to the firm. The chairman of the board of directors of HOG maintains that,

“Interestingly HOG’s starting point is totally Harley Davidson’s marketing thing ahh tactic. HOG is founded by Harley Davidson Company and even in the United States and Europe, other than the chairman, HOG’s directors, secretaries, and other people are dealer’s payroll employees... But we have been independent from the start... The number of Harleys sold in Turkey are very small anyway. So the dealer does not have the financial resources. Therefore, we finance our expenses ourselves, through dues from our members, we finance our magazine by you know advertisement earnings and so on. When it comes to we challenge Efsane, I mean we challenge the dealer and grab him by the collar. Improve the service quality, make the price of parts this, do that, do this. I mean sometimes there are serious feuds between us. These are because of our independence.”

However, although the chairman of the board of directors claims that HOG in Turkey is independent from the Harley Davidson dealer and has an influence over the dealer's activities a former member of the board of directors thinks otherwise:

“HOG exists because of Harley Davidson. If Harley wishes so, HOG would not exist... Because HOG's existence depends on Harley... HOG operates within Harley Davidson in many countries anyway. Here, there is the illusion that it is outside Harley. There is no harm in that as long as it reflects on the sales in a positive way. But, it can not act independently. Sometime ago for example, there was a problem with service and whatnot, let's go and establish or open up another service and so on, if you go there, then Harley can stop these efforts. Another reason they do not interfere much is because the expenses of HOG is very little for Harley here, I mean the sales are also not so high, so HOG pays for its own expenses. In fact, everywhere in the world Harley funds HOG's expenses, their sponsorships, and whatnot. HOG members do not have to try and find money and stuff for these activities. They just take pleasure in these activities. Harley organizes the activities, they would just go there and eat, drink, spend money, and leave. This is the way it is in the world” (Semih).

Semih here maintains that HOG in Turkey seems to be independent of the firm, however, this is so, because their activities do not cost a great deal of money for Efsane and their actions do not conflict with the interests of the dealer, but if things change in the other direction, Efsane has the authority to interfere. These accounts show that while there is a total managerial control over HOG organizations throughout the world, in Turkey there is a rather bittersweet relationship between the semi-autonomous HOG and Efsane Motor, the Harley Davidson dealer in Turkey. Although, HOG declares its independence, some members like Semih believe that this is a make-belief independence, which would only last as long as it benefits the dealer. Furthermore, Efsane Motor's CEO has a place in HOG's board of directors, and the dealer also helps the organization by

financing any discrepancies that may occur between incurred expenses and available resources during HOG activities. Therefore, at the end of the day Harley Davidson calls the shots when it comes to HOG organization and the brand community is managed, although with a somewhat invisible hand in Turkey, by the firm as in other parts of the world. The implications of this relationship between Harley Davidson firm and HOG will be discussed further in the believed level analysis section. On the lived level, because of the fact that HOG is managed, up until now, by the voluntary Harley riders, and that there is a Harley Owners Association, which is the legal entity that has been established by these voluntary riders to oversee the Harley Davidson consumer activities in Turkey, HOG (or HOA) does not attract the amount of interest it could from the Turkish Harley owners. One of the main reasons for this lack of interest is that HOG activities only appeal to a particular group of Harley owners where as there is a number of categories within the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey.

4.1.2 Categorizing the Harley Davidson Brand Community in Turkey

Every customer who buys a brand new Harley Davidson motorcycle automatically becomes a HOG member, but not a HOA member. HOA now has around 200 members. This means that only about a quarter of Harley owners are active in the HOA, and are able to, or willing to utilize its resources such as the Website, the magazine, and the various sponsored social activities. One reason for this lack of involvement is that

“There are people who have Harleys for 5 – 6 – 7 years and only made 2000 km. But there are a lot of these people” (Harun).

But a more important reason is that the Harley brand community in Turkey is a very heterogeneous community and there are a number of categorizations within the group as voiced by the respondents.

“We need to categorize these Harley riders, a lot of them do this just because of this pleasure. I mean they are not in anyway involved with the sport side of motorcycle. They solely to be looked at, here look he is also a Harley rider, he is also a thirty thousand dollar machine owner, I mean people with status issues are the majority... There is a group of people like me, I mean people who love the sound of this bike, who love the power, who love machinery, who are in love with machinery... There are people who are my age and now at the fall of their life, longing for youth, and use this in order to appeal to young girls, there is a group like that” (Atay).

“I mean there are really in actual fact there are people who ride for a lot of different reasons. For one there are friends who are passionate about motorcycle and who have preferred Harley Davidson. I mean although Harley Davidson is a legend, it is a two wheeled motorcycle at the end. And also there is a not too small, even, an even larger segment who uses Harley Davidson only to acquire social status” (Harun).

“There is a group who like to travel with their wives, mostly over their middle ages... They are a little bit older than us, they prefer to travel with their wives, maybe they drink less, and they talk more politely than we do among themselves” (Emin).

“There are groupings within the Harley group. There is the collection group; there are people who say I ride from Sunday to Sunday, I have my tie, my job, my driver; there is I spent five thousand dollars group” (Burhan).

As these accounts portray, Harley Davidson brand community members, without even being prompted, feel the need to categorize their own group. These categories are based on the degree of sportsmanship, status, life style, driving style, age, and the list goes on. However, when I looked deeper into the data, the informants' accounts revealed three main groups within the Harley brand community – two subcommunities, which crumble into sub-subcommunities within themselves, and another group of people who would like to be associated with communities but are refused by them and lack a community structure themselves. One of these subcommunities is Angels of Paradise, where the Harley riders either have a yearning for vagabond lifestyle of romanticized outlaw bikers like Hell's Angels, or have integrated Harley into their everyday life and established an emotional bond with the machines. On the other hand, some of the Playful Capitalists, the other subcommunity, use their bikes as a means to re-live their youth, for some it is just another hobby, and for others a weekend getaway with the family. The third group, which is said to be the largest, although none of my informants own up to be one, is the Social Wannabes, who solely use Harley as a status symbol, in order to be seen, or to meet people for business purposes. In the following sections I will discuss these groups in detail.

4.1.2.1 Angels of Paradise

Angels of Paradise have a nostalgic bond with the Harley imaginary in the United States. I use the word imaginary as this nostalgic bond was never there for Turkish consumers in the sense that it is a learned nostalgia, through books, movies, and telltales; but not a lived one. They are telling stories about the cowboy culture, and World War II veterans, Vietnam veterans and the Hell's Angels that they read, or watched, or heard.

“They used Harley in the Second World War, after 68 the kids from Vietnam returned to their country and most of them became Harley riders. Because they did not work, they are free in a way as they fought for years in the jungle, you cannot go and work at a hamburger joint after that. Most of them bought bikes and traveled. Then there are biker stories, that artist who died young, Dean, there is that, there is Hell's Angels” (Mansur)

Mansur, here, even empathizes with the soldiers coming home from the Vietnam War. The stories range from movies like *Easy Rider* and *Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man*, from stories of Hell's Angels 'burning towns,' to the legend of Davidson brothers working in their 1903 'shanty' workshop. They explain the Harley legend with these stories that are not a part and parcel of their own socio-historical context. Burhan, for example, maintains that there cannot be a 'real' Harley rider in Turkish context. He draws parallels between the cowboy culture in the United States and the 'real' Harley rider, who rides into the sun without any strings to tie him up to something or somebody, and claims that

“Harley has got nothing to do with the Turkish culture. The man who is riding a Harley would not have a home for crying out loud. But you need money, credit card or cash card, draw your money, load the tank, ride until the night. There is no such notion with us... There can be no Harley rider in Turkey. ‘Aha a bum came to town,” people would say.”

Although Harley Davidson does not have a nostalgic connection with the cultural history of Turkish social life, there are some stories about their first encounters with the Harley Davidson motorcycle. Turgay for example remembers their neighbor having three Harley bikes: Rosinante I, Rosinante II, and Rosinante III, named after the stubborn horse of Don Quixote and with a smile mentions that his bike is called Rosinante IV. Yaman remembers the magnificent sound and look of a Harley Davidson in the early seventies.

“In those times when we were riding Vespas, we were living at Dolmabahçe and someone at Teşvikiye had a Harley. It has wheels as big as a Volkswagen. We were staring at it, ‘this is not a bike man, this is a car’ we used to say, we were kids you know. Its sound was magnificent, its sight was magnificent.”

Most of these Harley Davidson bikes that they remember were the motorcycles that were brought to Turkey in order to be used in the army as part of the Marshall Plan in the early 1950s and that have been discarded by the army during the late 60s. Although some of the Angels of Paradise have these stories from their youth, these experiences are not about the legend of Harley Davidson, but only about their intoxicating form and sound.

Harley Davidson does not have associations with Turkish culture either historically or today, yet Angels of Paradise have emotional bonds with their bikes. These emotional bonds are created through lived experiences, and the bike

“A while later grows out of being a machine to be a living being. I mean naturally. And as I said its vibration and handling, everything makes you feel that. As I said sometime later you bond with it emotionally. You wonder how that is possible towards a machine but it happens” (Metin)

Similar to Metin, Yaman also considers his machine as alive and having a soul.

“Human beings, today with the technology they have achieved, can make everything, every kind of machinery. These machines can do everything. None of these machines have a soul. Harley Davidson is a rare man-made machine and a machine with a soul. I mean it talks one hundred percent to human soul. It is a machine that becomes alive with that soul.”

He narrates two stories to ‘help me understand’ how his machine has a soul, one in which his bike saved his life and another in which it, or shall I say ‘he’ as Yaman views his bike as a man, saved someone else’s.

“We were driving somewhere in Corsica, six bikes. It was 01.30 in the morning. Two of my friends were drunk as hell. I had them sleep for one and a half hours on their bikes; I did not allow them to ride like that. After they sobered up we were riding to our hotel, it is 01.30 in the morning. In a very weird way, totally from a road defect, I stumbled on a rock on the road and the bike stopped and I flew over it. When I flew over it my kidney burst, when I hit my head, ahh my brain burst. I was in a coma for a month, for three weeks they kept me alive totally with machines... It has been nearly nine months today. And for about three months now I continue riding my bike. But I guess if Harley Davidson was a high speed bike I would not be here today. I mean I am alive because of its strength and its power to survive. And a week ago, ahh, I am riding on the bridge from the

right lane... The car in front of me stopped and I had to stop too, we are in the middle of the bridge, the first Istanbul Bridge, The Bosphorus Bridge. The kid got out of the car, jumped over the barriers, held on to the railings, his feet are dangling in the air, about to jump, he is committing suicide... By stepping on the gas, in order to say I am here, because the sound of Harley's exhaust is abnormal, with that sound I am yelling at the boy 'look this great Harley stands in respect to you, it has respect for you, do not jump, this life is worth living... I am constantly stepping on the gas, bursting the exhaust but I could not think of anything else to say, so I am telling him how beautiful Harley is, how he should be riding one, and then he would enjoy this and would understand the joys of life through this. The kid's eyes are on me and he doesn't look to the other kid who slowly approached him and grabbed him... What I am grateful for is that Harley Davidson was the reason someone else's life was saved. I personally lived through this, I mean I am not telling a story, someone else's story, I personally lived through this."

Yaman thinks that an ordinary man-made machine without a soul would not be able to do that; 'talk' to someone in desperation and show him the life he is about to give up is worth living and also an ordinary machine would not have the 'will' to survive like his Harley did in Corsica and 'saved' his life. Not all of the stories are this striking, but all of the Angel's of Paradise have a similar view of their Harley's as having souls and alive, either by itself or through being an extension of their selves. Some see them as their friends:

"Someone who loves adventure. Someone who would never cheat me. Someone who would ride with me to death. A chum... Just like me. Honest, keeps his word" (Faruk).

Some as their lover:

"The woman I liked at first sight, who then I fell in love with, and now in a relationship, who I always want to buy things, I mean do something for" (Emin).

And some an extended part of their selves:

“Of course it is alive. Let me put it this way; it is a part of my body, it may be my arm, my leg. When it is not here, sometimes for example it may need repair, or it is snowing you can not ride for a week or so, believe me I fall to pieces. It is like I am sick, my soul dries up, I feel as if I am wrecked” (Mansur).

These accounts show that Angel’s of Paradise bond with their bikes on an emotional basis. They sometimes even talk to them when they are riding; they quarrel with them, and even make love to them.

“You know what that is like, that is like if someone would say: ‘Demi Moore, Sharon Stone, Brooke Shields, I would not touch them I would just look.’ But me; I would absolutely touch them. I caress my Harley just like I would caress a beautiful woman. I would like to ride them both” (Faruk).

This love with the machine, this emotional bond with the Harley Bikes is what makes these riders Angels of Paradise, but this subcommunity is not an unvarying community. Angels of Paradise is also a heterogeneous community that has sub-subcommunities within.

Hopeless Cowboys

One of the sub-subcommunities within the Angels of Paradise is what I call the “Hopeless Cowboys” comprised of people who desire to live a cowboy’s life style on their bikes.

“To be a Harley rider means the real Harley riders, really beautiful men. I mean Hell’s Angels. Yes, they are convicts, if you do not have a criminal record you can not join in. You have to pass a test. They have tough rules... They created this. Look at the history, all of them are like this. All of them have chosen freedom... have chosen to flee, they fled with Harley. You can not put most of the Harley riders in a room, I mean they go out the door and sleep outside. I am like that as well. For example I check into a five star hotel, go out the garden and sleep there. I had a girlfriend, I was with her for three years, she was an awesome girl, we would put our sleeping bags behind, no destination, we’ll go north, we’ll go south, we would just go” (Mansur).

Like Mansur these sub-subcommunity members yearn for the free rider image. The destination is not important for them, just the road. They also resemble this way of riding to cowboys in America and even one of the respondents draw parallels between the cowboy life style and the famous motto of traditional Turkish men – *At, Avrat, Silah* (Horse, Woman, Gun), which voices the three sacred possessions of men in the nomadic Turkish culture.

“There is the horse, woman, gun in Turkey you know, this somewhat corresponds to that I mean... Like a horse. In the United States actually these men were cowboys, after that they get on the motorcycle. What made Harley what it is today were people who lived according to the cowboy mind set, people who created the Harley image are those people. Devoted to freedom, somewhat outlaw” (Metin).

Mansur actually lives this 'outlaw' biker culture with his gang of thirteen bikers. There are three Harleys and the others are all chopper style bikes. His driver's license has been confiscated for driving without helmet and he continues on driving without either of them. They ride together, they go to bars, drink, pick up women, start fights.

"We are about thirteen fourteen people. Actually I am the leader of a hundred, but thirteen of them are truly my men, or we are each other's men. None of us are leaders actually, everybody is free."

He claims that they are not vagabonds, but their spirits are.

"They call us vagabond. They see those on television you know, since we were kids these are on television. However, our spirits are vagabond (*serseri*). *Serseri* comes from Persian *sarsari*. And that means one who does what ever comes to their head. *Ser* means head anyway. They watch these movies, they are shooting people, harass girls, runaway. So they think about those. We also do radical things, not that we do not. But I would never hurt anybody."

Yet he tells stories about bar fights, him going through the windows of bars with his bike, driving into pools, beating up people who disrespect them and so on. Where as Mansur claims to be living this 'outlaw' life, Remzi desires to join the Hell's Angels if only they had a chapter in Turkey. When enquired about the admission rule about the prerequisite of criminal record, he bluntly maintains:

"Of course I would. I mean I wouldn't go and kill anybody but I can do something. You know it is not just a petty crime you need. You need to shed blood."

Remzi claims to be ready to change his life in a drastic fashion by committing a 'bloody' crime in order to join the Hell's Angels. And yet another member of this Hopeless Cowboys sub-subcommunity, Burhan, who, although being younger than most is riding his Harley since 1993, would like to ride his Harley from dusk till dawn, without having to work, or think about a home and a wife – although he recently got married. He is a middle sized travel agency owner, and in his office he has framed pictures of himself from the 'good old days,' when he was not a boss, when he did not care about what his employees would think about him, or the people who he had to do business with. In these photos his head is shaven, he has belly long beard, and his arms are all covered with tattoos.

"This is the image I want. But you cannot do this here... My driving style is radical. Like a maverick. But this cannot be. Why? We live in Turkey. I cannot be radical because of my profession. You have to tone down. And this reflects on your life."

Another young Harley rider, a broker for one of the largest banks in Turkey with wife and a baby maintains that he admires the free spirited biker of the United States, but also admits that he cannot live according to that kind of philosophy of life.

"To live this kind of life style, a normal, standard, contemporary, when I say normal I mean white collared life style, and to say I am living the Harley philosophy, this I think is to be hypocritical. This is not possible. But as I said earlier, just because I do not live like the early days of Harley, does not mean that I wouldn't drive Harley. I may admire that but that does not reflect my life style... Maybe I do not have that kind of

conditions. If I had been born in the United States or somewhere like that maybe I would have been like that” (Metin).

These two riders desire the free biker life style, like the cowboys in the early days. They do not want a gang; they just voice the need for ‘just another rider like me’ and an endless road under the sun.

Content Bikers

Another sub-subcommunity within Angel’s of Paradise is the ‘Content Bikers,’ who are different in the sense that they do not desire the cowboy or Hell’s Angels life style, or even admire them like the Hopeless Cowboys. However, they do try to live on their bikes; they make Harley a part and parcel of their everyday life. They go to their jobs, their business meetings with their bikes whenever possible. They claim to have the biker spirit. They take pleasure, and even delight from riding Harleys. Rather than seeking hell they live the paradise on their bikes. One of these people is the only Harley rider in Turkey who has been awarded the ‘Iron Butt.’

“I have made the longest kilometer on Harley Davidson in Turkey. Ahh, more or less it has been 103.000 km. as of today. This means I am making 25.000 km. per year. I guess I am also the person who has made the longest trips... There is something called ‘Iron Butt,’ Americans have. Yes. There is a rally American’s have initiated. There you have to make 1000 kilometers in a day and I completed this 1000 km. in 23 hours. Ahh, judges came from the United States and officially registered it. I have the privilege of doing this with Harley” (Yaman).

Some of these Content Bikers did not even think of riding a Harley a few years back. For example, Semih admits to be against motorcycles, because he taught it was very dangerous. He was once sitting with a friend in a Mediterranean coast town, who has just arrived from Istanbul with his bike, and he remembers saying him:

“Man, you have come all this way on a bike. Seven, eight hundred kilometers. And you have your wife behind. God forbid something should happen. Leave this kind of stunts. I mean look how old you are, stay away from these kinds of things.”

After which, his friend blatantly told him that he should get one as well, and when they are back in Istanbul, he invites him to his home, takes him to his garage, makes him get on the Harley Davidson he had, and then took a picture of him on the bike and gave it to him. A couple of days later he bought his friend's Harley and after some driving lessons, he is now traveling a long the coast of Aegean Sea whenever he can, in addition to everyday in Istanbul.

And Mesut tells that he bought his motorcycle just to beat the Istanbul traffic and now he ‘became one’ with it.

“There is something between us. And I became one with it. I love it; I love my bike. I continually do this, ahh it is like human relationships.”

The Content Bikers sub-subcommunity is different from the Hopeless Cowboys in the sense that they now feel fulfilled by their life on their Harleys. Unlike the Hopeless Cowboys who have a desire for more; who feel that there is still something missing, these riders feel like they are in paradise, now that they have their bikes integrated in every part of their life.

“The distance between my home and my job is seven kilometers. In the mornings if the road is empty; if the traffic permits it I ride in zigzags. Did I tell you that? The reason for that is this, to be on the bike 10 seconds longer. I am probably the only one who does that. Just to be on the bike for another 3 seconds, I mean what difference does it make; seven kilometers, if I ride straight it would take probably seven minutes, if I zigzag seven minutes and 5 seconds, it would only make five or ten seconds difference” (Mesut).

Therefore, although Mesut bought his bike only as a faster transport in the Istanbul traffic, he came to love his bike so much that he tries everything to be with it even just a tad longer. Yaman explains how Harley made his life so much better. He maintains that riding a Harley everyday and integrating it within his work life has a number of advantages. He can go anywhere in Istanbul without getting stuck in traffic; and Istanbul traffic is probably one of the worst in the world. He can park his bike wherever he wants, which is another big problem in Istanbul. He even makes his client visits with his bike and this has also brought advantages because

“You never ever get stressed out; you can go to wherever you are going without any stress, without getting angry, getting into stress, but with pleasure. Going to a client without any stress has a number of advantages for you. First, because there is no stress, you go in to client’s office without any anger, with a sweet happiness. You talk about all good things,

and moreover, if the client sees you arriving on a Harley 55 minutes of the one hour meeting, the business meeting is on Harley Davidson. Because this motorcycle adorns his dreams as well. And the five minutes would be ‘What products did you have? Do you have this? Do you have that?’ ‘The price?’ ‘Ahh forget about the price you are a Harley rider.’ I have always witnessed this.”

For Yaman, as for the other riders in the Content Bikers subcommunity, Harley becomes a way of life, but it is not a way of life that contradicts their everyday selves, rather it compliments it.

“My state of mind when I come to work by car is very different than my state of mind when I ride my bike. Directly you start the day in a good mood. I mean this reflects on your job performance, and also it reflects on your behavior towards others” (Metin).

Not only Harley Davidson provides them with a positive emotional state but also, in turn this makes other people approach them in a positive manner.

“I started living life more, started living it longer. I have 24 hours to live. Those other people, they loose three hours a day, they calculate their day over 21 hours and they become tense. And that stress and anger effects their chemistry. I on the other hand am always positive. And I realized something; the more positive I behave, the more I make my lifestyle positive, the person I am interacting with automatically is influenced by this effect. You emit positive energy and this returns to you as positive energy” (Yaman).

Therefore, Harley Davidson regulates their own emotional state of mind and also helps their everyday interactions with others in work and elsewhere. It

becomes a part and parcel of their everyday routines, in a way that they cannot think of being without their bikes.

Both of these sub-subcommunities also crumble into other groupings depending on who knows whom and who gets along with whom. However, one common characteristic of Angels of Paradise is that they do not want to get involved with Playful Capitalists or the Social Wannabes. They do not want to attend HOG activities as they feel they are more like showbiz, where people would like to come and show off. They think of other Harley riders as phony.

“Most of them are like that, Lets not say most, but half of them are like that. I mean there are 500 bikes in Turkey and half of them are like that, the proper, and straight ones stay away from these activities anyway” (Semih).

According to Angels of Paradise other Harley riders in Turkey are only using Harley Davidson as a status symbol. They do not want to ride their bikes, but only to be seen on them.

“Of course there is that kind of people when we are going to Bodrum, they load their bikes on trucks. And before we enter Bodrum center the bikes are brought down on the road, cars are given to drivers, and ladies get on their bikes with pearls and stuff. Of course, this is something very contradictory to my view. I do not see them as bikers, we call them water bikers” (Gizem).

This biker notion is very important with Angels of Paradise. They do not think that Harley Davidson is an essential prerequisite to be a biker. They are

attached to their Harley Davidson on an emotional basis but this bond as I have explained above comes from their lived experiences. It is a bond with the machine, not the brand. What is important for them is the biker spirit. They always talk about a biker spirit; a free, uninhibited spirit in someone who lives life to the fullest on the bike. The other Harley riders for them bond with the brand.

“They are wearing Harley Davidson up to their underwear. This is not it. This is sharing a two wheeled machine at the end” (Burhan).

This sharing of the two wheeled machine comes from riding the bike together not from owning the same brand. According to Angel’s of Paradise being a Harley rider is not different than being a biker in essence. They maintain that other Harley Davidson owners only buy their motorcycles just for the sake of owning one but not riding it to the limit.

“I mean now the guy has bought a Harley, and without even riding it, sells it at 130 kilometers. There are people who buy a Harley, have a block of glass cut over it and make it into a coffee table. I mean the guy owns a Harley but is he a Harley rider? Of course not” (Emin).

These kinds of people are claimed to be a majority by the Angels of Paradise. And these are the people who only show up in official HOG organizations. Because

“If you cannot feel Harley Davidson inside, then what do you want? You want to be there on your Harley. What is the goal? The goal is ‘to be seen there on my Harley.’ I mean if that is your goal you go there like that.

There are friends who do that... But this is not what we expect from Harley” (Yaman).

Similar to Yaman, many of the Angels of Paradise feel that towards other Harley riders and official HOG organizations. Strangely though, some of these Angels of Paradise are also in the HOG board of directors and although they are the ones organizing activities they prefer to travel with their own core groups.

“I can not say that I take pleasure in these crowded organizations... these organizations are more about eating, drinking, and to have fun. These trips have this benefit for people; they get to know one another; it helps the little groups to form. I of course also would like to travel with people whom I enjoy their company, people who are compatible” (Emin).

Therefore, mainly why they take part in organizing these activities is to get more people involved however, they do not especially like to spend time with most of them. They either want to travel alone like Gizem and Semih or in small groups of two to 6 bikes like, Yaman, Harun, and Burhan. These groups are not restricted to Harley Davidson, for example Atay likes to travel with SuperEva riders – another bike community in Turkey with different brands of mainly chopper style bikes.

“I mean I realized that we are not singing at the same tone you know, that is why I am staying away. HOGs do not have the sportive notion, maybe some of them have. When I go to their activities I cannot speak with many of them anyway, I mean we do not speak the same language... They organize activities at places you even cannot ride your bike you know. It is not about bikes anymore... most of them come by cars anyway. I mean the idea is not to have dinner; the idea is to ride bikes.

Atay maintains that he cannot relate with the other Harley riders in Turkey as he thinks today Harley Davidson is a status symbol in Turkey and most of the Harley riders have bought their bikes for ego satisfaction. He maintains that the biker spirit is what is important and SuperEva riders have that spirit. Therefore, he prefers to hang out with them. This is true for most of the Angels of Paradise. They have their own little groups, with which they communicate by phone or e-mail and organize their own get-togethers. Most of these get-togethers are about biking events – trips to close by excursion spots, a ride in the city, or week long trips within Turkey or abroad. Some of the Angels of Paradise however, also prefer to get together without their bikes, in winter, for home visits and so on.

“We get together in winter, we celebrate birthdays, we get together weekends, and we go to have drinks. We do lots of things. As we are friends, when someone is feeling down, I invite them, you know come to my place, lets sit down, have a drink, spend the night at my place, and we can tell each other our problems. I mean it is not HOG for me anymore, you have a group of friends.”

Angels of Paradise resemble the Playful Capitalists in this way, getting together without bikes, but the differentiating characteristic is still the integration of Harley Davidson in their daily lives and routines and the bond they establish with their bikes for that. This bond is a corporeal bond that is formed by the acting out of their personal mythologies through Harley Davidson. As I have mentioned above this is different than the abstract bond that Hopeless Cowboys have with the brand based on nostalgic, romantic discourses of a foreign culture. The bond I am talking about is formed through personal mythologies based on their everyday lived experiences.

Personal Mythologies of Angels of Paradise

One such personal mythology example comes from Faruk, which may be labeled as *absentee father and boss*. Faruk owns a firm that supplies medical equipments to hospitals, clinics, and laboratories in Ankara. He has been riding Harley Davidson for four years and although he did not know how to ride a motorcycle until he bought his Harley, he now rides it everyday if the weather permits. He comes from very a poor family and maintains that he would never have even dreamed of having a Harley Davidson when he was young. He maintains that he did not have any toys grooving up and he did not live his youth fully as he needed to work and study at the same time and then he had to work very hard and he got married, had three children. Therefore, he feels that Harley Davidson for him is

“A way to get away from it all and freedom, you know three kids; two companies; you feel very much bounded. Even though you are the boss at the end you are very much tied up, I mean you can not leave, there is something that ties me up in a way. That [Harley Davidson] becomes the freedom I guess. Ahh, you can release every kind of emotion you have locked up inside.”

Harley Davidson is an escape for Faruk from his marriage and family life. He maintains that he does not want to ride his bike with his wife and as Harley riders are mostly act with their wives he will not attend to their meetings.

“Now to tell the truth I do not want to go with her. Ahh, of course, I am not like; I mean after twenty years of marriage you do not feel same the passionate love like newly weds. In time, ahh, it becomes an escape from

ahh, freedom; you know marriage suffocates me a lot. I was not a guy who was supposed to get married ever [laughing]. I love my wife a lot and I love my kids as well, but ahh my character is very different... If my wife rides with me I would not be escaping from anything. They would still be breathing behind my neck damn it. That is the way I feel.”

It is also an escape from his responsibilities as a boss; from his business life.

“Everybody wants to be the boss, and I also wanted to be a boss. Because I come from a very poor family. I have become a very good one as well, I have two-three companies. But now even these companies bother me. I have to be here everyday damn it [laughing]. There is something here that makes me dependent and motorcycle seems to me like a liberation.”

This does not mean that Faruk’s marriage is not a happy one. On the contrary he is very happily married, and his kids, in his own words ‘adore’ him. And this does not mean that he hates his job, his business, his work life either. He is very enthusiastic about his job when he talks about a new building that was being constructed; how he loves that building and to be involved in designing this new headquarters, how it will bring everybody under one roof, and so on. This only means that Faruk has a mythological self, a self that does not actually exist, an independent and liberated self who would like to just go.

Baskin: Now that you are on your bike and on the run from all this, where do you escape to? I mean where would you like to go now, if you were on your motorcycle?

Faruk: Believe me it does not matter at all... It is just the road that is important. It does not matter at all. Someone; if you had a bike for example and if you ride right I would go ride, if you say left I would go left. It is that simple.”

Therefore, it is the escape that is important for Faruk and Harley Davidson gives him that opportunity. He says that it is no different than taking your tent and climbing a mountain, or going skiing, or rafting. The only difference is that with Harley Davidson you can do it immediately, any time you like. This opportunity provided by his motorcycle in order for him to play out his personal mythology initiated the emotional attachment with the motorcycle. He maintains that he did not know the Harley Davidson brand very much until he bought it and he would probably feel the same things with another bike. Therefore, the attachment does not grow from the attributes of the brand but from the way it is utilized by Faruk in his everyday life and its ability to solve his personal mythological problem by aiding him in his escape from daily responsibilities. Faruk, because it helps him to act-out his mythological self, *the absentee father and boss*, now maintains that he ‘loves’ Harley Davidson, the brand he did not even know existed a few years back.

Mansur’s personal mythology on the other hand is to hold on to his late wives memory and never to settle down after loosing her to an accident. His mythological self can be labeled as *bereaving husband* as he acts out this vagabond free rider who would never substitute his dear wife with something else, and who would rather live haphazardly as if to reassure her that he will never forget her.

“I cannot even begin to express the love I have for my wife, my late wife, she passed away. I cannot describe her love; I cannot do that for motorcycle either... My machine is the same for me... I would not be this much of a biker if my wife had been living. I have become like this in the

last ten years. I was not like this ten years ago. I had my own business until three years ago. I have not been working for the last ten years, after the accident. I had my own workshop. I had a five storey retail shop at the Mirrored Mall in Beyoglu, I had my summer house, I had my winter house; I lost it all. I did not work, or if truth be told I had no ambition.”

Mansur now works for a manufacturing firm and as for payment, other than expenses, he gets a bike for every job well done. This time for example he will get a Harley Davidson. As he mentions his bike now is like his wife, but he also distances himself from it by always referring to it as his machine. This machine helps him to play out his mythological self, the still mourning husband who never did get over his loss, still living in the transient, and, in remembrance of his late wife, refuses to settle down through the only thing that resembles the love they shared.

Another Angel of Paradise, Semih has another personal mythology – *perfect father*. His Harley Davidson provides him with the opportunity to act out his mythological self as a caring father who would do anything to close the generation gap between himself and his son.

“Then I thought to myself, my son will grow up and he will want to ride a bike, and I will be against it, if he goes out and buys one anyway I will forbid him, and he will ride in secret. I mean isn’t this what they call generation gap? Yet, I am someone who would never want something like this to stand in the way with my son. And I always maintain that elder people should be the ones who keep up with the youngsters. You cannot expect from them to act in accordance with us to close the generation gap. I mean if my son goes to a nightclub, I should also be able to go with him no matter what my age would be. I have to have that spirit and perspective. It has to be like that. Then I said I should not wait for that day. I have to achieve that now, so that my child would grow up to see that in me. If I want to reflect good things, I am riding and how I ride, you know boys

always take after their fathers, so that if he desires to, he would ride like I do, and then I would be able to keep him from harmful things. This can be achieved only like that. And so I said I am buying one and I did.”

For Semih, his Harley represents the very object that closes the generation gap that may surface with his son. Now that he is an everyday, responsible biker, through Harley Davidson he acts out his mythological self as the *perfect father* figure, every child’s dream. Through riding his Harley Davidson, he can show his son that he is, in mind and spirit, very much alike him, a mythological father who will be able to show her son that you can at the very same time be wild at heart and responsible and mature.

Angels of Paradise all have mythological selves; some are *make-believe cowboys*, some wish to act out like a person who is a *positive energy radiator* in response to all that is negative around them, some would like to be *lawbreaking criminals* with wife and kids and a successful firm, and so on. These personal mythological selves are acted out through Harley Davidson and in turn create a bond with their motorcycles as well with fellow mythological characters.

Angels of Paradise is one of the subcommunities within the heterogeneous Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey. This subcommunity is also divided into sub-subcommunities like Hopeless Cowboys and Content Bikers. These fractions are formed based on the different meanings that the consumers give their bikes with in their everyday lives – where as for Hopeless Cowboys Harley Davidson is a reminder of who they want to be rather than their everyday selves,

for Content Bikers it is a complementing part and parcel of their everyday lives. These sub-subcommunities also dissolve into further groupings of riders. The communal relationships within these groupings however, are not about Harley Davidson, but rather are based on a fit between personal, social, and cultural values. These lived communal bonds are formed through the negotiation of conventional social relationship dynamics. The bond between the consumers and their bikes, on the other hand, on a lived level are formed through the ability of Harley Davidson in aiding these consumers as they act-out their own personal idiosyncratic mythologies. I will discuss these bonds in detail at the end of this chapter after the analysis of the other subcommunity, Playful Capitalists, and the third group that everybody talks about but nobody owns up to, the Social Wannabes.

4.1.2.2 Playful Capitalists

The second subcommunity within this heterogeneous Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is what I call the ‘Playful Capitalists.’ This subcommunity is comprised of rich, successful, respectable business people. ‘Playful Capitalists’ also is divided into further sub-subcommunities, yet there is one unifying theme for these Harley owners and it is the fact that Harley Davidson is “just another hobby” for them.

“I cannot say that I have a fervent motorcycle hobby. I have studied, and then came work life. One of my hobbies is sports. And bike is one of them.

But I cannot say that it is my primary hobby... What it means for me is a way of passing time” (Ferhat).

Ferhat is a founding partner in a major holding company in Turkey. He maintains that throughout his life all he did was work, either as a student for grades or as a family man for money. Now that he has the time and money to spare for himself he rides his Harley, a gift from his wife for his 50th birthday, as one of the many ways in which he passes that spare time. Aslan, another holding company owner, maintains that

“Mother nature has determined a number of obligations for each individual. You need to feed some other people, protect them, and care for them. Then there are other things you need to do for others. In order to do all this you need to do some things for yourself. And they call these things hobbies... You always give, give, and give in your personal life that it empties you, and you have to fill that up in some way with energy so that you can empty that as well. These are the things you do for yourself... I have lots of hobbies. Bikes and fishing, cooking, sailing, painting and sculpting, ski instructor, diving.”

Aslan truly has a lot of hobbies. During our interview he made confirmations on his next two plans for filling up his energy stock – a trip to the Alps for glacier skiing, and a sailing trip for hunting sword fish. For Aslan, Harley Davidson is just like these other hobbies of his, a way to fill up the energy tanks that he empties while working for ‘others.’ This notion of ‘others’ probably represents his family, however, it also points to his other self – the Harley riding, sport enthusiast, artist, who also cooks. This other self of Aslan is looking for ways in which to rejuvenate his self who is sick and tired of working through out his life. Harley Davidson is one of the ways in which these ‘Playful Capitalists’

spend their discretionary time and income. They do not have an emotional bond with the brand itself like 'Hopeless Cowboys,' or even a strong love relationship with their bikes like the 'Content Bikers.' As Talat puts it, Harley Davidson for the members of this subgroup is nothing but

“Just one of the elements that keep me entertained.”

Related with the entertainment factor is the 'toy' status of Harley Davidson. All of the Harley Davidson owners in this subgroup refer to their bikes as something they play with for fun, and pleasure.

“It is like a puzzle you know. It is like when I dye my hair or have it cut in different styles. I would play with it like that” (Gamze).

Gamze views her Harley bike as a toy and maintains that if she had the opportunity, she would play with it all the time. Gamze also talks about other members of this subcommunity. Although being a member of this subcommunity, mainly because of her husband's involvement, she also retains an outsider point of view on account of her sex difference from most of the group. As a woman amongst a community of mostly men she makes observations with a different perspective.

“Now, for example there are HOG board of directors meetings, and I go to these meetings, I became a member. There, it is all different, their conversations with each other and stuff. They are all businessmen, but I see their childish side. They are all good employers, managers, business owners, I mean they own factories, and whatnot, but there, they are all

different. Each and every one of them becomes a child and they act so far away from being professionals with every little thing.”

This observation by Gamze is also corroborated by Ziya. However, Ziya first maintains that Harley Davidson

“... is not a bike for early ages. It is for mature people.”

But then he views Harley riders in HOG activities as

“Grown-ups being childish in a way.”

This, in a way, self criticism within the Playful Capitalists subcommunity is also voiced by the Angels of Paradise, but with an agenda to ridicule. For example one of the Hopeless Cowboys argue that

“They cannot understand the spirit of Harley. The idea is just to share a two wheeled machine. They did not have a toy when they were ten years old. Now when they are fifty they buy what ever toy they want with their own money and no one can interfere. So they play with it how ever they like. This is what we live through around us today” (Burhan).

Burhan is strongly against the idea that Harley Davidson is turned into a mere toy, with which older rich capitalists can play with. He maintains that the idea behind Harley Davidson is that it is a machine that in a way becomes you, or your extended self, through customization. He also views this customization as in a way play, but a serious one. One should play with Harley with a lot of thought

and effort, and for the aim of creating that bond with the machine. The play is not about just how much money one spent on the bike, which makes it just an object, a toy.

“I want someone who can answer me when I ask why he did what he did, you know. Otherwise it is not important whether he spent three thousand dollars, or five thousand dollars. It means something only if he can give a personal answer.”

And he maintains that most of the Playful Capitalists cannot give that answer, which makes Harley Davidson

“A toy. If you did not have many toys when you were young, I guess you look for a toy when you are older. I can say that it is a kind of toy for the rich” (Faruk).

This is how the Angels of Paradise undermine the toy status of Harley Davidson for the Playful Capitalists; a rich men’s toy that is stripped off its spirituality and only viewed as an object. However, it is obvious that Playful Capitalists do not deny this object status. But mind you, Harley Davidson for this subcommunity is not an ordinary plastic toy just to play with. Some even go further and display this object, their ultimate designer toys when they are not riding it. For example, Ziya a restaurant and bar owner puts his Harley Davidson at display on a podium in the middle of his establishment during winter. Another couple who each have a Harley Davidson reveals that

Sevin: Actually, just to own it is a good feeling. I, for example, am not a regular rider but.

Kaan: We put them in the living room during winter for example.

Sevin: We put them as an ornament.

Kaan: We clean them and we display them.

Sevin: That is also a good feeling. I do not know if I can make myself clear. Just to own it is a good thing. I do not ride that much for example. When I do ride I take pleasure, but apart from that, that I own it also gives me pleasure.

This conversation with this young couple actually explains the main difference between ‘Angels of Paradise’ and ‘Playful Capitalists.’ While ‘Angels of Paradise,’ as I mentioned above, place more importance on the biker spirit than on the Harley Davidson as a brand, for ‘Playful Capitalists’ this order is reversed. For ‘Playful Capitalists’ Harley Davidson is the ultimate toy. The biker spirit is not very important for them because this is just a hobby. Yet, even just to entertain themselves the Playful Capitalists need the best toy there is. Erhan even views the Harley Davidson brand as the inventor of motorcycles.

“A very old firm, as if it is the first firm that made motorcycles. I can almost see the workshop that they first made them, I know all of it and I can also visualize the first model. And I, there is a book, encyclopedic, starting from the founding, it is at home now. I bought it from the United States. It has all the details, everything, all the products that they had been offering, those brothers establishing it and so on, it provides all. I can visualize the factory in my mind; it is not a factory at those times a workshop. I know the bikes that they rode” (Erhan).

Therefore, from a book he bought during a visit to the United States, Erhan travels back to 1903 and by ‘almost’ seeing the first Harley model in the small workshop he establishes the Harley Davidson Company as the first ever firm that produced motorcycles. Harley Davidson’s becoming as the ultimate toy for Erhan goes back to his early teens. He was playing with bikes since he was twelve years

old and he tells a marvelous story of how he bought his first bike – 0.5 horse power device that you hook up to a bicycle – and his adventures with that bike and the ones that followed until he got married and work life became a priority. But even then he knew of Harley Davidson.

“In our neighborhood there was a lady whose brother was living in Ankara. And her brother would come from Ankara to visit with his Harley. It had a side car and it was in military colors. I would never forget. And its gear stick was on the tank, on the tank, it was very old. I mean we would sit down and stare at it, my God, vaow, this and that.”

Erhan recalls that Harley bike as it was yesterday. But his fascination is not just a memory of a neighbor’s Harley. He remembers how he used to travel all the way from Istanbul to Izmir every year during late 50s to the Izmir Fair.

“Every year Harley would open a stand at the Izmir Fair. And I would go from Istanbul to the Izmir Fair to watch Harley. They would attend the fair with three to five Harley Davidson motorcycles. And I would watch them. I would go from here, during the years 1956, 57, 58, each year we would go there, we would just stare at them for two days and then back to Istanbul. And this Harley fascination has begun there for me.”

Therefore, Harley Davidson was the greatest toy of all for Erhan, for which he would travel all the way to Izmir, nearly 600 kilometers, which was not an easy thing in the 50s for a fifteen year old, just to look at those bikes. Then after about forty years later he bought his first Harley, his dream toy. Erhan’s “Harley fascination,” however, does neither come from the iconic image of the brand as for the ‘Hopeless Cowboys’, nor from integrating the bike with his everyday life as the ‘Content Bikers.’ Erhan is fascinated with the machine. Since

his childhood, and since his first 0,5 horsepower bicycle enhancing machine, he has been playing with machines, and he loved to take them apart, clean, mend, and then assemble again. For him, Harley Davidson is the ultimate machine as it still uses the old technology; it is mechanical like his previous toys – yet he does not play with it like he used to with his other toys. Although Erhan is fascinated with the machine this does not mean that he has the biker spirit of Angels of Paradise. As the other Playful Capitalists, Erhan also maintains that

“What my bike means to me is, a machine that keeps me away from stress. I mean my hobbies. It is a machine that shares my love, I mean something that makes me relax, that is a part of the things that I love.”

The toy status of Harley Davidson for Playful Capitalists is also evident as most of the members of this subcommunity view their bikes, like Erhan, as just a machine, rather than a somewhat living companion having a spirit as Angels of Paradise do.

“At the end this is just a machine. I mean it is a machine made from iron and steel... And ahh, they do not have a soul or anything” (Erhan).

“I am not a person who is into fictitious things you know. I am very realist. I mean a motorcycle is just a motorcycle. I do not have an emotional bond with material things... I mean I do not give too much importance. They are just things that entertain me” (Talat).

Both of these accounts mirror the view of most of the Playful Capitalists. Where as most of the Angels of Paradise assign their bikes as having a somewhat living being status without being prompted – they have names for them, some talk

to them, and some view them as their companion – Playful Capitalists do not entertain the idea that their motorcycles might have a living being status until they are probed, and only a few played along after probing while others maintain that it can only be a machine, just a toy that they use for fun.

This ultimate toy status of Harley Davidson for Playful Capitalists suggests another difference between the two subcommunities. As I have explained above Angels of Paradise gives more importance to the biker spirit than the brand itself, where as the Playful Capitalists are more attached to the brand name of Harley Davidson. Therefore, they are more conservative when it comes to the people they ride with. For members of Angels of Paradise

“There is no difference between a Harley rider and a Mobilet [a Turkish scooter brand] rider in terms of the biker spirit” (Emin).

However, for Playful Capitalists there are differences. For example, Talat maintains that

“There are a lot of difference. In Turkey Harley riders are a very elite segment. They are above average. Other motorcycle riders; there are people from every social class. I mean when we go on trips all riders are above a certain level.”

Talat does not want other brand riders in their community.

“‘I am a biker and you are also a biker,’ I mean we are against that. There is no such thing. I mean who the hell you are... I mean I am not a man in your class... A Harley rider never goes up to the Japanese riders to suck up

to them. Why?.. But the reverse happens a lot. Because of social status of course... I mean just because he got himself a two wheeled ridiculous thing that he is one of us. There is no such thing.”

Talat views Harley Davidson riders as very different than the other bikers, for him, and for most of the Playful Capitalists, Harley Davidson ownership differentiates them from other bikers and they want HOG as an exclusive club. They do not want other brand users to ride with them. Gamze, another Playful Capitalist by marriage, corroborates this view among the Playful Capitalists and maintain that there is a kind of ‘fanaticism’ among Harley riders when it comes to their community. For, Faruk, an ex-member of this subcommunity, this fanaticism is one of the reasons he shied away from this subcommunity.

“I am against one thing. I am not against the biker spirit, but ‘Harleyism.’ I mean why not a BMW owner can ride with Harley riders? They take me with them with my Harley. I mean they have biker spirit. I do not believe that there is a Harley spirit.”

Faruk told me about his plans of buying a BMW cruiser bike, ‘a more comfortable bike for the longer trips,’ so when I enquired about whether he thinks Harley riders would accept him when he attends the activities with his BMW or not he maintains

“I wouldn’t go, I wouldn’t. They probably would not like me to go with them.”

Therefore, like most of the Angels of Paradise, Faruk is also criticizing the Harley fanaticism of Playful Capitalists. However, this is not a problem for Playful Capitalists as it is never about the biker spirit for them, but rather it is about a hobby; it is about playing with a luxury toy, which they then show off each other. This showing off is based in the sound and appearance of Harley Davidson bikes. The sound and appearance is important for both of the subcommunity members. However, there is a difference in the intended audience of these physical characteristics. For Angels of Paradise the intended audience is the rider himself/herself. This is explained by Burhan in a very delicate fashion:

“It takes you away with its sound and appearance. You would like to see someone who looks as good as you when you look at your side. Only if s/he has also individualized you can share something. It gives you pleasure only if there is that someone beside you. You do not understand it when you are riding, you understand it only when you see it... You would like to see yourself within the one riding beside you. I wish I could install mirrors around my bike and see myself.”

Burhan likes to ride with two or three people by his side not more. What he desires is to see himself in those people. They come to represent the mirrors he would like to have around his bike, because his audience is himself. The sound and appearance of his bike have an inward audience like most of the Angels of Paradise. However, Playful Capitalist's show has an outward target. This is criticized by Angels of Paradise. For example, Faruk talks about a trip to Bodrum organized by HOG, when some of the Harley riders had their bikes shipped there rather than riding them to Bodrum.

“One may send the bike to Bodrum because of a back pain. But the other reason for this is they think ‘who would see me like this all the way from here to Bodrum. I would just send it and ride it there shiny shiny.’”

Talat’s respond to this criticism goes like this:

“We shipped the bikes from here by trucks, I am sorry to say [smiling]. That is what the other riders make fun of you know. I mean I cannot ride from here all the way like a sucker okay. I do not care what people say really.”

And this is exactly the difference between the two subcommunities. The Angels of Paradise enjoy riding for themselves. But for Playful Capitalists it is too much of a hassle to ride all the way to Bodrum, or Greece, or Austria, sitting on a vibrating machine all day long under the sun. They just want to be there on their bikes, not all the way there.

Faruk carries on with his criticisms:

“They lie around the pool all day sunbathing and in the evening they put on their full outfits and ride into the city center, pata pata pata. Just for show.”

But the Playful Capitalists like this show.

“That sound. It is a sound that differentiates you. Actually it is a disturbing sound for the environment. But again you make them say ‘Here comes Harley.’ I have to admit that we take pleasure in this. What kind of pleasure? A pleasure of distinction I guess” (Ferhat).

For Erhan the sound of Harley Davidson is very important, for he is, as I have mentioned above, a machine enthusiast. The sound of the machine he maintains is like music to him.

“Now, the sound of a Harley is magnificent. The sound of two Harley’s is more magnificent. The sound of fifty Harley’s is an astounding orchestra. To be within that orchestra gives you pleasure.”

Although here in this account Erhan seems to be enjoying the sound of Harley for his own pleasure. When I asked him to explain the pleasure that he is talking about he tells a story when they were riding through villages in Greece with about a hundred Harley Davidson bikes.

“We are riding through towns, all the people are outside, some with fearful eyes, some in amazement. Why? Can you imagine that sound from afar? An incredible vibration, an incredible sound, it is as if a tank brigade is coming for invasion. We enter the town and it is like judgment day. Because all the alarms in cars and everything start going off because of that vibration. It is a huge ruckus until we pass. Of course this gives you pleasure. It is maybe like the satisfaction of certain complexes, it gives you pleasure.”

Therefore, for Erhan as well there is an outward audience for the sound of the machine. He enjoys the show they put on and admits that the mixed emotions of amazement and fear they generate in their audience give him some kind of satisfaction. This deviation of audience between the Angels of Paradise and Playful Capitalists – inward and outward respectively – is based on how each group views their bikes in the first place.

To sum up, Angels of Paradise view their Harley Davidson motorcycles as a way of life. Although they cannot actually live on their bikes, they nonetheless have integrated them in their everyday lives. For, Angels of Paradise the biker spirit is important, not the brand. Yes, they also think Harley Davidson is the legend and the ultimate bike with its stories, its sound, and its looks, but these features of Harley Davidson are for the biker spirit within themselves. However, on the other hand, for Playful Capitalists riding motorcycles is just another hobby; it is no different than playing tennis, sailing, scuba diving, camping, and so on. Harley Davidson for this subcommunity is the ultimate toy they can play with in order to carry out their hobby. Again it is ultimate because of the stories, the sound, and the looks, but for them the audience is different. Where as Angels of Paradise take pleasure from just riding their bikes day in day out as an integral part of their routine, for Playful Capitalists Harley Davidson is just a play in both senses of the word. It is both a play with a luxury toy as well a play they stage for an outside audience.

Until now I have talked about the common meanings and practices of Playful Capitalist in order to differentiate them from Angels of Paradise subcommunity. However Playful Capitalists is also not a homogeneous subcommunity and there are sub-subcommunities within, such as *Family Travelers* and *Grownup Children*.

Family Travelers

Family Travelers use their Harley Davidson bikes for family vacations. This sub-subcommunity is a very close-knit group who call themselves ‘Cheyenne.’ They wear different clothes, they have their own insignia, and they have t-shirts and flags. Erhan tells the story of how this group initiated.

“We are HOG members, but there are people we get along, we have friends. We always would like to travel with our wives, they like this hobby as well [his wife also has a Harley Davidson]. And we always travel by ourselves. This is how Cheyenne group was born. Now, in HOG there are certain kinds of people I mean when you are riding bikes or you know when you are socializing you have a number of friends. Some you only say hello in passing and some you are very up close and personal. We were more or less 15-20 friends and we realized that we are very close and with others yes we know them but, ahh, our way of lives, our families; we are much closer. So we said lets make something that belongs to us and we started the Cheyenne group.”

The Family Travelers prefer to go on long trips with their wives as holiday vacations. Since 1999 they have traveled abroad to Greece, Italy, and France. For these trips they ship their bikes by ferries and they travel by plane. They get their bikes there and ride along the coast line staying at hotels for a couple of days to enjoy the sun and the sea. They also travel within Turkey to places like Assos and Bodrum. Other than riding their Harley Davidson’s together they have also become neighbors as they each bought summer houses at the same holiday village in Bodrum and they all go there from time to time. They ride their bikes only for these summer holidays but they also get together in winter time and weekends, for dinner parties and birthdays, and so on.

“Every week we, ahh every week we say ‘What shall we do? Lets go to Wanna [a luxury restaurant in Istanbul],’ we go there and have dinner. ‘Who has a birthday? C’mon lets go to Zarifi [a luxury bar-restaurant in Istanbul], let’s go here let’s go there,’ I mean always. If the weather is nice on a Sunday right, for example it is cold but it is not raining, ‘Let’s go to Şile [a sea side suburb in Istanbul] to eat fish, or to Rumelihisarı [a seaside neighborhood in Istanbul], where else, or we go to Tekirdağ [a neighboring city] to have meatballs” (Erhan).

Erhan claims that other Harley riders are not as close as they are.

“I mean it is more enjoyable when you are together with people you feel closer to. One phone call and ‘How are you? What are you up to? Let’s do this or that.’ For example what do we do in winter time? We are not like other HOG members. HOG members drift apart during winters. But we, absolutely every week, we celebrate for example everybody’s birthday together. There is our list, in this list we have everybody’s birthday written [he goes to bring the list]. Here is our list. Let’s see whose birthday is nearest. Ahh on the 26th there is (...) birthday, then 25th of July there is mine, and then on 5th of August there is (...) ... Then there is the marriage anniversaries, there is that. So what happens is when you get together like this there is an activity all the time and you do not drift apart.”

Therefore, Family Travelers organize a number of different activities that have nothing to do with Harley Davidson motorcycles. They get together nearly every week even during winter and through these activities they stay together as a social community of like-minded families. They do not attend most of the HOG organized activities and cruises, and even if they do stay within their closed community during these organizations as well. Erhan maintains that their way of life and their practices do not harmonize with that of other Harley riders. The fact that they only want to travel with their wives is the point of difference. Within their sub-subcommunity they have created a close knit atmosphere where they not

only travel abroad and within Turkey for holidays but also come together nearly every week for other social occasions with out their Harley Davidson motorcycles.

Grownup Children

The other sub-subcommunity within Playful Capitalists is the 'Grownup Children.' The Grownup Children are what may be called weekend riders. They generally would like to ride their bikes only on weekends, other than an occasional HOG organized trip, during which some have their bikes shipped. Instead of long journeys they prefer short trips within or around the city to places where they can eat or drink and socialize. For example Talat, when he is comparing his car as a means for transport with his Harley Davidson, maintains that he rides his Harley just for fun, where as with his car the idea is to go from one place to another. He says with Harley Davidson there is no transport intention, rather they "make up activities just to ride their bikes." These activities generally involve short trips to local restaurants or bars. This sub-subcommunity is one of the reasons why Atay has bought both of his Harley Davidson motorcycles second hand, as they provide a source for pre-owned but not much used motorcycles.

"I mean the longest they ride is you know when they go somewhere during the weekends, and that is only in summer, they do not ride during winter time. And these trips do not take place every weekend. The bike does not

make much kilometer when you just ride for 50 kilometers to have a cup of coffee and back.”

Faruk, who was a member of this sub-subcommunity, criticizes these weekend activities and maintains that he will no longer attend these.

“What they do is they go to a restaurant in Gölbaşı [a lakeside suburb of Ankara]. They ride from here to there for fifteen minutes and they drink for five hours. How they can ride after that is beyond me.”

Talat agrees with Faruk on this issue but he also maintains that this is actually fun.

“I mean when the alcohol dosage is exceeded, and it is always exceeded, alcohol consumption is increased too much in these trips. Then in that frame of mind everybody acts as if they were in their 20s or 30s... They do not drink alcohol they bathe in it. It is interesting. They drink in other occasions as well. But when they are on a bike trip they drink maybe three times as much. But this is fun really [laughing].”

The fact that the Grownup Children acting as if they were young is also observed by Gamze. Gamze is a member of this sub-subcommunity by marriage. His husband is actually an active member of Grownup Children and Gamze has the opportunity to observe them in their activities.

“As a woman, I am 43 years old, I observe them change identities. Their identity there is very different. The identity there is a carefree, unconcerned, bold identity. I mean after about one two three drinks the identities totally change. They become children who put on a show.”

Therefore, these Grownup Children use Harley Davidson as a toy through which they not only play with their motorcycles, but also with their grownup selves and pretend to be children without any responsibilities or care for ‘proper’ conduct. For when they put on their Harley Davidson clothes and ride their bikes “they feel the urgency to relax.” This urgency according to Talat sometimes is carried to extremes.

“Now for example our friend [...]. Damn it this is being recorded I will get into trouble. Anyway, our respectable friend [...]; is it appropriate, those weird rings everywhere, bizarre outfits? I don’t think it is appropriate. His physique cannot carry that look, neither his appearance, nor his age. But when people wear those clothes they think they earn the right to behave in a more frantic manner.”

As it is manifest in these accounts, this sub-subcommunity of Grownup Children is the most criticized group both by other groups within the Harley Davidson brand community and also by the members of this sub-subcommunity. Nevertheless, Grownup Children also is a community of Harley Davidson motorcycle riders who have strong attachments to their motorcycles. Although, as I have mentioned, they view their bikes as just toys that entertain them, they are not in any way ordinary toys. These toys provide their players to act out their own personal mythologies similar to the other groups within the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey.

Personal Mythologies of Playful Capitalists

Talat's personal mythology, for example, is to live like the young *university student*. Talat is a 44 year old civil engineer who owns a construction firm in Ankara. He views his Harley Davidson as just another hobby. He maintains that he is a very realistic person who does not give any emotional importance to material things in his life. He has many hobbies other than Harley Davidson. He is a professional diver, he plays tennis on a regular basis, and he also works out everyday. These hobbies of Talat all have a common factor. He maintains that they are all aimed at 'regulating' his mental well being, which is under a lot of stress as a business man. However, I have realized that other than this utilitarian function of Harley Davidson in his life, Talat also uses Harley Davidson to act-out a personal mythology, which forges an emotional attachment to Harley Davidson and the brand community on an emotional basis as well. Talat maintains that

"To be a Harley rider is something that compliments me. I mean it is something that does not look absurd with me. But something grabs my attention ahh, the large number of people who ride Harley in Turkey as ahh, ... I mean he had not lived his youth, he had missed the train, he missed the train right, and I do not know he is now, ahh. Now, you can still be young at the age of 50. Now I am not that young. I am 44 years old. I mean do I look like I am 44? If I put on a pair of stretch jeans right, I can pass as a senior at Bilkent University. I would put on a pair of sun glasses and they will not be able to tell from the eyes as well. This is a life style for me. This is about how I live. But now he is what, even his butt hairs have grayed right, and he has this full grown belly and ass and what not okay. When he wears these Harley clothes and you know I mean it is absurd, it does not look good."

It is true that Talat is a fit man and looks younger than his age, but it is a bit exaggerating to think that he can pass off as a university student for he is more than 20 years older than the average senior student. Therefore, this unlikely student image that Talat has in his mind is his personal mythological self. He maintains that this is his life style although he is married with children and running a big company, which are not usually associated with a university student's life style.

Talat also resents other Harley Davidson brand community members who he thinks look absurd on their motorcycles.

“I mean I am against these kinds of things. For example people think they have the right to be wilder when they wear those clothes. I mean you do not become wilder when you sit on a Harley or wear Harley clothes. This is a style, I mean this is about suitability. I mean the way I behave when I get on my bike is not so much different from how I behave otherwise... I mean it is very unpleasant when 50, 60 year old people try to behave like they were 30.”

However, he feels it is very suitable and complementary of his lifestyle when he, at the age of 44, behaves like a twenty-something student. This image does not look absurd on him as it is his personal mythological self. Harley Davidson, in Talat's life plays the crucial role of objectifying this imaginary mythological self. Through Harley Davidson he can act-out to be the young *university student* and this ability he is offered by Harley Davidson attaches him emotionally to the brand and the community members who share similar

mythological selves to the extent that he considers them closer to him than a coreligionist³.

Another example of a personal mythology, the *wonder woman*, is Gizem's, who did not even think about riding a motorcycle until seven years ago.

"I never even considered buying a bike but I always liked them. I have never even dreamt about riding one... The brother of a business friend had his bike shipped from the United States in a container and I happened to be there by coincidence when they were opening the container here, but the brother was not around then, he was still in America. That day, when they were opening up the box and the chromes glowed shimmering I made the girl promise me that when his brother arrives he will take me to a ride first thing, or that I will not bring them anymore work."

Then the brother arrives and he takes her to a ride, during which they make a stop at the Harley Davidson dealership.

"We went into the store. I was hit there and then."

And she bought her Harley Davidson on that day seven years ago. For her, Harley Davidson is a means for showing the world her independent, strong, stand-alone woman self. Gizem works for herself in the textile industry, which is one of the most cut-throat businesses in Turkey. Although textile business is highly populated by woman, they are mostly low level workers in factories and textile is probably one of the industries where the power distance is largest between men and women in the workforce. Gizem is a freelance agent in this industry, which is

³ See the relevant quotation in the following section (p.61).

one of the most powerful positions as she is the one who brings in business from large firms she represents in Turkey. She has a live-in boyfriend – they are not married although they call each other husband and wife sometimes. She has been divorced two times because, in her own words, she ‘would not put up with Turkish men’s machismo.’ Gizem views her bike as a very powerful ‘masculine’ machine. When I enquired as to what would her bike be if it was a living thing, she maintained that it would not be alive because it is a machine, but then immediately after that she said maybe it would resemble a horse but with an important difference. ‘You can not control a horse’ she said ‘but I can control my bike. Therefore, she views her bike as an embodiment of masculine power, which she can control. These information about Gizem all point out to her desire to maintain her power and control over her life as a woman in a highly patriarchal society like Turkey. She chose to work in a traditionally male dominant business as a powerful woman, she chose a boyfriend who would not suppress her after divorcing two unsuitable men for their machismo, and now she chose to ride one of the most powerful, largest, and loudest bikes in the market that she maintains is masculine. According to Gizem

‘It gives pleasure to ride Harley in a country like Turkey as a woman. In a way you would like to show that women can do anything.’

Therefore, for Gizem Harley Davidson is a tool for showing the Turkish patriarchal society that she has the power and control; it gives her the ability to act-out her mythological self. She plays this mythological self in her business life, she plays it in her personal life, and now through Harley Davidson she plays this

mythological self in her social life as well. She is like the *wonder woman* who shows the world that women can do anything just as she can tame a powerful, massive, and masculine machine.

I have shown in this section that Playful Capitalists is another subcommunity within the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey and just like Angels of Paradise, this subcommunity also comprises of sub-subcommunities like Family Travelers and Grownup Children. For both these sub-subcommunities their Harley Davidson motorcycles represent a hobby. Communal relationships between the consumers on a lived level are not formed around the Harley Davidson brand. Similar to Angels of Paradise there are small friendship groups that are based on compatible lifestyles, interests, and family relationships. Although being just another hobby, there is still a strong emotional bond formed between the brand and the consumers. This bond is not about the brand stories ascribed by various market agents, but rather based on Playful Capitalists' experiences with the brand grounded in their mundane daily selves. Harley Davidson, by playing a very important role for consumers as they impersonate their mythological narratives, becomes indispensable for these riders. I will return to the discussions on personal mythologies in a moment, but first let me finish introducing the groups within the heterogeneous Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey with the last group of riders that came out from my data.

4.1.2.3 Social Wannabes

The third group I will talk about within the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is not actually a subcommunity. All of my respondents when they are talking about different categorizations within their community mention the Social Wannabes, but none of them think of themselves as one. Social Wannabes, it is claimed, are the Harley Davidson owners who solely bought their bikes to be associated with Harley Davidson brand community, for various reasons.

Harley Davidson brand community is, as I have mentioned before, the most visible brand community in Turkey. Most of their activities are followed by the press and they get both print and televised media coverage. Some of their members are among the most prominent business people in Turkey, and some from the high society. Through these aspects Harley Davidson motorcycle has become a status symbol in Turkey. Therefore,

“[t]here is a not very small, or actually a very large group of people who use Harley Davidson just to gain a social status” (Harun).

“Their purpose is not to be included in this group and live the biker spirit, but rather it is to appear in magazines, to be seen on newspapers, to be noticed by people, to let people see that they too own a Harley Davidson” (Burhan).

“You know how people consider being a Mason or Rotarian or something like that as giving them a certain social status, it is like that. They view Harley as an easy way to buy social status” (Murat).

Although this status symbol position of Harley Davidson is not appreciated by my respondents and they do not want to be seen from outside the community as “rich people entertaining themselves,” their activities are used by the Harley Davidson Company and Efsane Motor for marketing purposes and create that kind of an image. Yaman maintains that Harley Davidson Company

“[b]enefits a lot from HOG from an economical point. Ahh I think this is rather at odds with the spirit of Harley. But it is essential economically.”
And for this economical reason

“HOG organized activities are based on show. I mean it is the whoopee version... And this is the aspect that the media is interested in; the style the press looks for. This is the dramatized, showbiz element. We have not seen anything on the media about the Harley Davidson philosophy. All you see is the photographs of everybody on their bikes, lined up like soldiers at a party in the evening and their names are printed under the photo. So the guy goes out and buys a Harley and parks it at the entrance and the photographers rush his way. That is the whole deal.” (Harun).

Therefore, the marketing efforts of Harley Davidson through HOG in Turkey contribute to the reinforcement of Harley Davidson as a status symbol. On the one hand this show aspect of HOG activities encourage people to buy Harley Davidson motorcycle for status, on the other hand it makes ‘real’ Harley riders to avoid these activities and retreat into their own informal sub-subcommunities.

Other than social status, another reason for Social Wannabes to buy Harley Davidson motorcycles is to get acquainted with prominent figures within the brand community, to be included in their social circles, and to exploit the membership for business purposes.

“Who are the people who buy Harley? Generally over middle ages, ahh who have attained a certain economic power. Their spending power is, ahh today Harley Davidson is the most expensive motorcycle in the market, it costs about twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars. And not only you spend that amount but also put on a lot of accessories and continue spending money. Therefore, these people have economic power and they know how to spend money. So if you would like to sell something to these people, if you would like to be around them the easiest way for that is to buy a motorcycle and blend in with these people for commercial intentions. There are some friends who think they can do business, buy something, and sell something together. Ahh there are some friends who have that desire for doing trade” (Yaman).

This account by Yaman is not an empty claim for when Gizem explains what Harley Davidson brought in her life, she admits that

“Of course through social activities, our group, I have made a lot of nice friendships. Therefore, due to the positions of the people I know, I have also made a lot of business connections. I mean it opened up new avenues, I cannot deny that.”

Furthermore, Talat maintains that

“If someone comes to me as HOG member, someone who has business with me, I would give him precedence. I guess, it never happened to me but I guess they would do the same for me.”

Therefore, within the Harley Davidson brand community, although the sole intent of buying Harley Davidson for establishing business connections is frowned upon, these things happen and there are Harley riders who hold such expectations. These accounts, taken together with the discussions on sound and appearance of Harley Davidson, and how Turkish Harley riders take pleasure in being noticed and differentiated, suggest that there is maybe a Social Wannabe in every community member. Yet, all of my respondents maintain that there is a separate group of Social Wannabes, with whom they do not want to be associated. These Harley Davidson owners are the ones who only attend to big HOG organizations, which are considered only as show by the other Harley riders. These are the ones who

“Wear these stupid, fancy helmets that do not have any protective function... It is funny actually, and proves my show off thesis. They wear their legal helmets on the road, but when they are passing through a town or somewhere like that they take these off and put on their other helmets. I mean they pass through with those helmets on when they are on the road again they switch. There is this interesting practice” (Atay).

These are the ones who

“Buy this motorcycle for a status or charisma tool. There are people who buy this motorcycle in order to get themselves a young girlfriend” (Emin).

And this is just the thing that made them furious when a Harley Davidson owner told a journalist that

“The prestige of a Harley rider within the group is determined by the age difference with his girlfriend” (Hurriyet, Kelebek, 1 June 2004, p. 1).

The article talked about a trip organized by HOG to one of the luxury holiday resorts in Fethiye, the prices of Harley Davidson bikes some riders have, and the ages of riders and their girlfriends. This newspaper article has attracted a lot of scolding by the HOA and my respondents maintained that it has really damaged their image in the public eye.

“Here, a man said something; he stood up and said some stupid thing. We are doing so many charity works, organizations, aids, and so on. We could not make it into Hurriyet newspaper even in small captions; but a dim-witted thing told by a man made the headlines” (Emin).

“(…) discredited us. He put us back. I mean, because we ride motorcycles, because we wear black leathers all over, and wear black glasses... we are already being regarded as odd people. But, we had good relations with the press, and you know we help schools, we try to help Turkish economy by helping Turkish tourism, and so on. Because of these we moved in the public eye to maybe 1.005 but now, because of (...)’s fault we are maybe again back to negative. He harmed us. But this is his loss. I myself will not talk to him, I will not salute him. I do not like him” (Mesut).

As I have mentioned when I was discussing the foundation of HOA, one *raison d’être* of this association is to show to the public that they are not just a bunch of bikers, but rather they are a group of respectable citizens who also work for the good of society through charities, international organizations, and creating a lobby to improve traffic regulations. However, as mentioned by many of my respondents the press generally is interested in the show part of Harley Davidson in Turkey. Only some interviews with Harley Davidson executives and HOA

presidents make it into newspapers, and these are about the need to change the traffic rules and regulations to improve the safety of motorcycles. This high interest of the press with Harley riders in Turkey is one catalyzing factor for Social Wannabes to buy Harley Davidson in the first place.

Social Wannabes, through this enthusiasm of being seen on the media, are actually the group of Harley riders that the Harley Davidson Company in Turkey rely upon for marketing purposes. I have mentioned above that the ‘real’ Harley riders do not like to attend to HOG organizations, but rather, they act within their own sub-subcommunities. HOG organized activities are generally pursued by Social Wannabes. However, this group does not constitute a community like the Angels of Paradise and Playful Capitalists. Whereas these subcommunities, with their sub-subcommunity formations, portray traditional communal relationships, Social Wannabes are maybe more like the Harley Davidson brand community in the US with only ephemeral relationships formed solely around the brand, which do not flow into everyday relationships of consumers.

Personal Mythologies of Social Wannabes

Although the Social Wannabes do not constitute a subcommunity per se, they still are a part and parcel of the general Harley Davidson brand community umbrella. And although I do not have a first hand data on this group of Harley Davidson owners, as none of my respondents actually admit being one, I can still

explain their relationship with the Harley Davidson brand through a personal mythologies perspective. The accounts of my respondents portray Social Wannabes, as people who bought Harley Davidson just for status purposes; they either would like to be seen on the media, or they would like to be associated with the other Harley riders who are high ranking individuals in their line of business, in order to be included in their social circles or to establish business relations. According to my interpretations of these accounts, together with the media coverage of Harley Davidson riders, which portrays the brand community as highly successful people in the society,⁴ I can arrive at a more general mythological self construct that encompasses the idiosyncratic mythological selves of Social Wannabes. Social Wannabes' mythological self is a successful social self, who is a member of a socially visible group of highly successful business men and women, who are esteemed members of the social circuits, important people who get constant media coverage. They are either *accomplished business people* or members of the *high-society*. They would like to be noticed and be appreciated in the society or in business networks and through the use of Harley Davidson motorcycle they achieve this personal mythology. Therefore, although I cannot specify idiosyncratic personal mythologies of Social Wannabes, I can conclude that they have a general personal mythology of *success* as a social status, either a social or a business success, which they act out through their membership in the Harley Davidson brand community.

⁴ Some of the many examples of these kind of newspaper articles are "Harley Motorun Olacak ki (Sabah, 06.03.2003); "Kaskların Altındaki Ünlü Hayatlar" (Sabah, 23.05.2004); "Çeyrek Asırlık Genç Virtüöz (Radikal, 22.12.2004).

In the preceding sections I have talked about the lived level analysis of Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey. Through this lived level analysis, I find that Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is a heterogeneous brand community with subcommunities – Angels of Paradise and Playful Capitalists – which further break up into sub-subcommunities through a process of establishing communal relationships among consumers based on non-brand related, mundane, daily lives. After the brand introduces the consumers with each other, it gets out of the equation and conventional socialization processes take control, where people who feel closer to each other form friendship groups. Communal relationships among these groups include organizing dinner parties, holidays taken together, celebration of birthdays and wedding anniversaries, home visits and so on. Apart from the two subcommunities the data also revealed a third group of Social Wannabes, which does not depict traditional communal relationships like the other subcommunities, but rather represent a group of Harley Davidson owners who solely get together around the Harley brand during HOG organized activities. Although these groups do not like, or even sometimes despise each other, they have a common denominator that explains their relationship with Harley Davidson brand on a lived level. All of my respondents have their own unique make-believe narratives, which I call personal mythologies that they come to play through their Harley Davidson motorcycles.

4.1.3 Personal Mythologies Acted Out

Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is a very heterogeneous community comprised of subcommunities, and sub-subcommunities, which are formed, not because of inherent characteristics of the Harley Davidson brand, but with respect to consumers' compatibilities regarding their personal, social, and cultural values. However, there is one common denominator across these Harley Davidson riders regardless of the subcommunity they belong to. That is the strong relationship established between these consumers and their Harley Davidson motorcycles, grounded in the role Harley Davidson plays in their acting-out of their idiosyncratic personal mythologies. Harley Davidson brand facilitates my respondents to act-out their personal mythologies, which in turn stimulates them to build a strong attachment to the brand that plays an essential role in this enactment.

The examples of personal mythologies of Harley Davidson riders in Turkey were *absentee father and boss*, *bereaving husband*, *perfect father*, *university student*, *wonder woman*, *accomplished business men/women*, *high-society status*, which are experienced through the brand in respondents' everyday lives. These mythological selves are all idiosyncratic instances that are based in the mundane social lifeworlds of individual Harley Davidson brand community members. Although, Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is a heterogeneous community made up of subcommunities, these personal mythologies are the common factor in every subcommunity.

Just as the Social Wannabes *success* mythology, the personal mythological selves of the other Harley Davidson brand community members; although they are personal and idiosyncratic, refer to more general categories as well. These categories are *independence* and youth. For example, Gizem's sovereign, powerful self as a mythological *wonder women* in patriarchal Turkish society is about the independence category. Mansur's *bereaving husband* narrative who mourns his late wife is also about independence. His mythological self is still very much attached to his beloved wife and he refuses to be bound with any other thing. Through Harley Davidson he impersonates this independent *bereaving husband*. Contrary to Mansur, Faruk as an *absentee father and boss* seeks to be independent of his wife as well as his businesses through Harley Davidson. Semih's personal mythological self is the *perfect father* figure who bridges the generation gap with his son. This personal mythological self he presumes through Harley Davidson enables him to be young at heart as his son. Talat's example also refers to the youth category as he plays the role of a *university student* at the age of 44 through Harley Davidson.

These examples show that consumers of Harley Davidson motorcycle in Turkey establish a bond with the brand through their own personal idiosyncratic mythologies based on their mundane everyday realities. Harley Davidson is used by these consumers in order to experience these personal mythological selves and through this ability of the brand in solving the personal mythological problems consumers feel a strong emotional attachment to Harley Davidson. Although they

are specific and unique, these mythologies of Harley Davidson brand community members in Turkey refer to the three general categories of success, youth, and independence, which, although emanating from local lived level mundane experiences of consumers, also point to fairly universal categories.

The preceding sections provided an analysis on what I call the *lived level* of Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey. Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is a very diverse community. On a lived level the brand community consists of subcommunities – Angels of Paradise and Playful Capitalists, which include sub-subcommunities within, as well as a further group of consumers who do not portray a community per se but rather who would like to be included in one of these communities – Social Wannabes. These different groups, as I have mentioned are not especially fond of each other, and even sometimes despise each other. They do not want to be associated with other groups; they do not want to ride with other groups; and they do not want to spend time with other groups. Strong communal relationships are only formed among those consumers who are socially, culturally, and personally compatible with each other. Harley Davidson brand only facilitates the meeting of these individuals and then the conventional dynamics of social relationships take control and people who feel themselves personally, socially, and culturally closer become friends as they get together without their bikes most of the time in dinner parties, they go to movies together, celebrate birthdays, and make home visits. Therefore, on the lived level there is no sense of one, all-encompassing brand community among

the Harley Davidson riders in Turkey. However, on what I call the *believed level* there is a different story.

4.2 ACT 2: Believed Level Analysis

Although on an everyday lived level Harley riders in Turkey do not constitute a comprehensive community, nonetheless, whichever subcommunity they belong to, all my respondents believe that there is not only a local but also a universal community of Harley Davidson riders.

“This is what makes Harley what it is. When you think about Harley, the purpose is not just to ride a bike. I mean Harley is not just a vehicle. I mean, with its world wide groups and this and that; it entirely becomes a common language” (Metin).

Metin, therefore, believes that Harley Davidson is a common language that can bring every Harley rider together. However, when he is probed as to whether he speaks the same language with the Harley riders here in Turkey he maintains that

“Of course there is something like this too; I mean you can never get along with everybody 100%. When you are involved with a group people who are similar to you automatically come closer and you start being together with them. Motorcycle only brought us together; we come together with people we feel compatible with in everyday life as well.”

Therefore, Metin, on a believed level holds the idea that through the common language quality of his Harley Davidson motorcycle, he can relate to any Harley rider in the world. Yet, on a lived level he does not actually experience this common language notion with local Harley Davidson owners. He maintains that he speaks the language of people he feels compatible with and that not because of Harley Davidson, but rather because of this social compatibility they come together.

Gamze also retains the same universal oneness idea. When we were talking at a coffeehouse in Istanbul on one of the busiest streets of the Anatolian side, a Harley Davidson drove by and she immediately turned and looked at it, so I enquired as there were a lot of cars and motorcycles passing by but she only turned to look at the Harley. She said she needed to look as

“It is as if another me is passing by.”

She explains this by maintaining that she believes everywhere in the world Harley Davidson riders have a single identity, which they also express to others around them.

“Wherever you go in the world, there is one identity each of us has, there is this one identity everybody reflects when you say ‘I am a Harley rider’” (Gamze).

She has this image of Harley Davidson as offering its consumers a single, unifying identity.

“This is like, you now when you go to pilgrimage there is a shared energy. People are different, you are different, I am different, and so on; but there is a shared common energy. A shared silent communication. I understand you and you understand me too; no matter what our languages may be. We are at the same place... We are the same in spirit.”

Gamze resembles the Harley Davidson rally in the United States, which she has not been actually but heard about, to the religious spectacle of pilgrimage in Islam where Muslims go to Mecca each year and gather around the Kaaba, where they revolve around this sacred place, wearing the same white clothing. It is really a spectacle if you see these thousands of people wearing the same clothes turning around a building from above; it is really moving. And I suspect that it can really make one feel to be one with all the others around them chanting prayers to Allah. However, I do not know if this is comparable to Harley Davidson riders gathered around, with similar black leather clothes, and chanting rock tunes together, but Gamze believes that these two happenings emit the same shared energy, a higher level silent communication and understanding through, on the one hand Allah and Islam and on the other Harley Davidson brand. Although she has not been to either of these events and does not have a personal experience as such, she still, on a believed level, supposes that Harley riders all over the world ‘are the same in spirit.’

Gamze, although believes that there is a unified Harley Davidson brand community universally, she also maintains that

“We have a different concept here; we are a different group of people when you compare with abroad. There, most of the Harley riders are unemployed; no job so they spend their entire day working on their bikes; they really incorporate and integrate Harley with their everyday lives and have a different life style. At least the ones I have seen were like that. With us it is more of a hobby, a means for pleasure cruises, to belong, ahh, to make some friends.”

Therefore, opposite to her beliefs, which are based on hearsay, her actual experiences on the lived level cause her to differentiate between the Harley Davidson riders abroad and in Turkey. She knows first hand that Harley Davidson riders are very different when it comes to lived level experiences not only throughout the world but also within the Turkish group as well.

“There are people within HOG, as I said before, whom I will never get together with, never sit on the same table.”

Yet she still believes that on a higher level they are one and the same like religious brothers on a pilgrimage. Gamze is not the only one who compares fellow Harley riders to religious brothers.

“This is a very important common trait you know. I mean it is not like wearing the same suit or something. I mean for me a HOG member is more important than a coreligionist⁵” (Talat).

So for Talat, Harley Davidson brings about such communality and shared mutual traits that a HOG member means for him more than someone who has the same faith with him. However, although he has this belief that Harley riders share

⁵ Talat here actually uses the concept of *din kardeşi*, which in Turkish means more than merely someone who has the same religious faith, but rather refers to a brotherhood of religion. Traditional Muslim faith views all Muslims as brothers and sisters and for some, belonging in this family like community (Ümmet) is even more important than membership in the national community (Millet).

something more important than religion, he had serious reservations about riding in the United States when they were making plans for a trip with some of his Turkish Harley riders.

“For example we had a plan to go and ride the Route 66 in the States... And we worked very seriously for that program. Everybody would be able to rent a brand new Harley from there, whichever model they wanted, and so on. But then we could not go because they said ‘they would kick the shit out of you there.’ Of course, I mean they said ‘Look at yourselves, you can’t pull off being Harley riders, you will get yourselves kicked’ and so on. Of course there are different kinds of groups there.”

This may be an exaggerated account by Talat, but nevertheless this is what he maintains the reason why they have cancelled the Route 66 ride. He may believe that Harley riders have a more common and unifying identity than religion, but when it comes to the lived experience he has pictured himself being kicked around by the ‘real’ Harley Davidson riders in the United States and cancel the program.

Mesut explains very clearly that the riders in the United States are very different than Harley Davidson owners in Turkey.

“I go to Denver in winter times and on two occasions by luck I have come across what they call a Swap Meet. Swap, meaning exchange, it is like a flea market. They rent a large space like a sports center or a basketball court. And there, there is someone who sells three of his screws; someone who sells his saddle, or a carburetor; there are used bikes for sale; people sell their pants and jackets. I have been to these meetings and I observed them. There I saw religious Harley groups, now I forgot their names, they are religious groups; Harley riders, Christian something Harley Club. I saw the Hell’s Angels. They probably go there to find more members. I observed people there. They are very different from us. Definitely and

unbelievably different. Some of them are Vietnam veterans; nearly two meter long; hairs and beards all messed up; long hairs, pony tails, ear rings, tattoos all over their arms; Vietnam veterans with no legs. I mean they are a shabbier group than us. The bikes are also different. Here what do we do? There is one Harley Davidson store; we, like we played with Lego when we were kids, buy these accessories and we put one on and take one out. Their bikes are not like that. Just now you asked me whether my bike is a man or a woman. I have never considered that until now. There, there are people who build their bikes like a girl. Really, I would call those bikes she... They create their bikes there... They are not like ours... They fully reflect their emotions in them I don't know, maybe their own characteristics. For example if my starter motor breaks down we throw that away and put on a brand new one, it costs 300 or 400 dollars I do not know but everybody here just replaces it. There, one day I saw a guy buying, or maybe he was ordering it, a little spring that goes under the motor gear or something like that. And I asked the guy whether he will fix it himself and he said 'of course.' ...I mean there are so many differences between us. He is the Harley rider not me."

Mesut here provides a nice detailed account of his visits to a couple of Swap Meets in the United States. He not only differentiates between the Turkish Harley Davidson riders and their counterparts in the United States from a physical appearance point of view, but also more importantly he compares the bikes and their relationships with the bikes. According to Mesut, American Harley riders are a shabbier group of people, who are more serious about their motorcycles – they are not playing games like children as they do here. They craft their bikes in order to reflect their own emotions and characters. Therefore, they get more involved with or closer to their bikes over there through dismantling and assembling their bikes in order to 'create' them or 'fix' them. These differences Mesut observed first hand on a lived level made him realize that those are the 'real' Harley riders not themselves.

Similar to Mesut's amazement of Harley Davidson brand community in the United States, foreign Harley riders are also sometimes amazed by the Turkish Harley Davidson brand community. For example, it has been mentioned by several people that during a HOG organized trip to Athens, the Greek Harley Davidson riders were amazed by their Turkish visitors and enquired as to what kind of Harley riders were they in an ironic way. Burhan maintains that this amazement is due to fact that:

“They stayed at five star hotels everywhere we went. I think we were 114 bikes in total from Turkey. It was amazing how easy those bikes were going. And when you go out in the evening wearing your starched shirt prim and proper, of course the Greek would make fun of you... They cannot bring the biker identity into their work life. Instead they bring their identity in business life onto the bike. And if that guy always wearing suits and ties at work he wants to do the same when he is riding the bike. Greeks probably meant that we are too luxuriant to live the Harley Davidson life... But there are people riding like that everywhere, but we do not have ten different kinds of riders. Ten Harleys are sold abroad while in Turkey only one is sold. Therefore, there is only one kind of Harley rider in Turkey while they have ten different kinds.”

Burhan refers to the entourage following the Harley riders from Turkey; the cars and vans carrying extra chauffeurs, mechanics, wives, and luggage, when he mentions that the bikes were going a bit too easy. He argues that the Greeks were probably amazed at this luxury. I have also observed this difference between the Turkish Harley Davidson riders and the ones that have come from abroad during the National Rallies organized by HOG Turkey. In these rallies there were Harley Davidson riders from a wide range of countries; riders have come from the United States, Poland, Bulgaria, Italy, Finland, and Germany. Nearly all of these riders have stayed in tents that they have brought with them, which they have put

up in the rally area. Only some of these riders stayed at hotels. For example some of the riders from Bulgaria stayed at a three star mediocre hotel in one of the cosmopolitan, oriental districts of Istanbul. However, the Turkish Harley Davidson riders that arrived from Ankara all stayed at some of the luxurious hotels in Istanbul for the duration of the rallies.

Although Burhan maintains that Greek Harley Davidson community members were probably amazed by the luxury of their Turkish counterparts, he also adds that there are these kinds of Harley riders everywhere in the world. The only difference, according to Burhan, is that in the United States, Europe, and even in China there is a wide variety of different kinds of people riding Harley Davidson, but there is only one kind in Turkey. Therefore, according to Burhan, Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is very different than the Harley Davidson brand community elsewhere in the world in the sense that it is arguably more homogeneous, which would make it a more cohesive community one would expect.

Emin attests to this cohesiveness among Harley Davidson brand community members in Turkey.

“Now look, the important thing at the end of the day is to ride Harley. When you own a Harley, when you are riding a Harley, whoever you may be is not important, everyone will help each other on the road; they will wave at each other, and they will become close friends very easily because they speak the same language.”

Emin, as the president of the HOA in Turkey, here maintains that Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is a closed knit community and solely because you own a Harley Davidson motorcycle all other Harley riders will become your friends and even stop to help you if you are having any problems on the road and so on. While at the believed level he argues very strongly for a unified Harley Davidson brand community, Gizem's account below shows that on the lived level he does not practice what he believes in. Gizem remembers a trip to Fethiye organized by HOG when there was a young lady rider with them who is not a very good driver.

“[t]he bends are unbelievable, I mean they are all s-shaped, and you start to become exhausted, it is the last stage of the road, there are no lights, it is dark, the bends, so the girl was very afraid... She got so scared, I got behind her, because if I stayed in front of her she would fall behind and no body waits for you, actually they have to wait... Then [Emin] came to me and he said “(...) rides too slow now and she causes breaks in the group. We do not want her.” And I said “Excuse me [Emin] but we are on the road now; and we brought this girl here.”

Gizem maintains that everyone else also mumbled some objections and at the end she and a couple of her friends left the group with the young woman and ride the remaining road together. These accounts show very clearly that Emin on a believed level has an image of Harley Davidson brand community as a traditional community where any member would be an integral part and parcel of a cohesive, unified group and every member would be helped and cared for solely because they own and ride the Harley Davidson brand, yet he himself does not live according to that belief. He and the other riders can consider leaving behind a

rider in need, whom they know in person, on the road, let alone helping some anonymous Harley Davidson owner.

A similar incident of leaving a rider on the road when his bike broke down during a trip is reported on one of the forums on the WebPages of HOA. A rider complains about how he and other riders were left behind on different occasions due to technical failures or accidents and maintains that he will not attend to these organizations anymore as this was not a communal group and he does not consider certain Harley riders as his friend. Faruk clarifies this view by explaining that after his observations, now he came to an understanding that

“There is no friendship sentiment among Harley riders. None of them would even offer his beer or an hour of his time for another. I am saying this without a doubt. There is no friendship... In my opinion, let alone give their life, they would not even give their one or two hours of their time, or one or two billion of their money for me. My observation: not for me, not for anybody for that matter.”

This is not actually true of course. As I have shown on the lived level analysis there are very strong friendships among Harley Davidson riders in Turkey. But these friendships are formed among consumers with compatible world views, lifestyles, and social and cultural values, like any friendships would be. However, these accounts also show that a community like relationship structure does not exist on a lived level among Harley Davidson riders just because they are riding the same brand of motorcycle. Yet, on a believed level these accounts show that Harley Davidson riders assume that there exists not only a local but also a universal brand community among the consumers of Harley

Davidson motorcycles, which presupposes a homogeneous group of people who would understand, help, and become friends with each other anywhere in the world.

These beliefs are catalyzed by the Harley Davidson Company through the marketing of Harley Davidson brand community. Harley Davidson, on their webpage, introduces HOG with the announcement that

Your New Friend are Waiting for You

Harley-Davidson® established the Harley Owners Group® in 1983 in response to a growing desire by Harley® riders for an organized way to share their passion and show their pride. By 1985, 49 local chapters had sprouted around the United States, with a total membership of 60,000.

Rapid growth continued into the 1990s, and in 1991 H.O.G. ® officially went international, with the first official European H.O.G. Rally in Cheltenham, England. Worldwide membership numbered 151,600, with 685 local chapters.

As the '90s continued, H.O.G. hysteria spread into Asia, including new chapters in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. By 1999, worldwide membership had hit the half-million mark, and the number of local chapters totaled 1,157. Today, more than 900,000 members make H.O.G. the largest factory-sponsored motorcycle organization in the world, and it shows absolutely no signs of slowing down.

What does the future hold? No one can say for sure, but from here the road ahead looks long, wide open, winding, and scenic – with lots of new friends to make along the way. So why not [join H.O.G. now](#) and come explore it with us? We promise you'll enjoy the ride.

Therefore, Harley Davidson markets HOG as a universal community of more than 900,000 'friends' from all over the world waiting for every new Harley Davidson owner to join. The company even goes further to establish a mission for the Harley Davidson brand community members.

Our Mission

Your mission – if you choose to accept it – will be a simple one: "To Ride and Have Fun."

Here's the bottom line: We like to think of Harley-Davidson – from the top corporate officer to the newest Harley owner and rider – as one big, happy family. The Harley Owners Group® helps us turn that philosophy into reality.

Does that sound like something you want to be a part of? Then [Join H.O.G. today](#). You'll ride. You'll have fun. Mission accomplished.

The mission of Harley Davidson owners all around the world is to join this global big and happy ‘family’ which encompasses not only the riders but the Company employees from top to bottom.

This company induced image of the big and happy Harley Davidson brand community family is also taken up by the media. My analysis of the Turkish newspapers showed that Harley Davidson riders are referred to as a homogeneous group of people which they call ‘*Harleyciler*’ roughly meaning Harley riders. For example when I asked about a newspaper article about a large group of American Harley Davidson riders paying a visit to President Bush to support his campaign against Iraq, Emin got furious. He maintained that it is very disturbing that the media is referring every Harley Davidson rider with the same ‘*Harleyciler*’ label.

“A hundred or two hundred HOG member Harley rider can go and support him, I mean I have nothing against that... HOG has nothing to do with politics. We also as HOG Turkey have nothing to do with politics. But we have Armenian members, Kurdish members, Jewish members, members from MHP [the far-right nationalist political party], we have communist members right. Three or four of our members can go and do this or that.

We can not tell them what to do or what not to do. But we do not as a group act in a political way... Ten HOG members can go and do that. But you can not say *Harleyciler*. Why? Because in the United States I think there are about three or four million Harley rider. Now, if ten HOG members out of this three or four million went to support Bush, that won't mean that *Harleyciler* support Bush. That would only be ten Harley rider support Bush. It is very important to choose the right words."

A similar argument like this took place with Emin during the interview about the news piece quoting the HOG member who claimed that that the prestige of a *Harleyci* is in direct relationship with the age difference with his girlfriend. Emin, and some of my other interviewees were all furious with this newspaper article as it reflects as if all Harley Davidson riders are the same. Therefore, although the brand community is marketed by the Harley Davidson Company as a happy global family anyone can join by owning a Harley bike, and although this image is perpetuated through the mass media that puts all Harley Davidson riders under the same *Harleyciler* label, and although through these imaginations my respondents believe that there is a universal Harley Davidson brand community that implies oneness, this does not change the fact that on a lived level they are not as one and also do not want to be seen as such.

In the lived analysis section I have shown the heterogeneity of the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey. This section focused on the believed level analysis of the data in order to show that although on a lived everyday experiential level an all-encompassing Harley Davidson brand community does not exist in Turkey, my respondents still believe that there exists a universal Harley Davidson brand community. They believe that they share the same spirit with Harley

Davidson owners all over the world; they believe that spiritually they are one and the same. This belief is perpetuated by the Harley Davidson Company as they market HOG on a global basis as a big and happy family. Mass media images and articles also help disseminate this belief among consumers of Harley Davidson in Turkey. Even though these beliefs on the universal brand community seem to be dissolving when the respondents are probed about their lived level experiences, they are nevertheless voiced proudly and loudly.

4.3 A Negative Case: Integrating the two levels

During the course of recruiting interviews I have actively looked for a negative case and come across one such individual. Ahmet is a 38 year old translation agency owner living in Ankara. He has been riding his Harley Davidson since 2000. He is not a member of HOG or HOA and throughout these six years he has not been to any of the HOG organized activities or excursions. Unlike many of the Harley Davidson owners he is using his motorcycle as a means for transportation. He maintains that other Harley riders in Turkey views Harley Davidson motorcycle as a prestige symbol.

“HOG members view their bikes as a prestige tool. I just see it as a transportation tool... There is no parking place or traffic problem.”

And then he adds that

“It is not as much of a prestige symbol either as they exaggerate it to be. Maybe just due to its price”

Ahmet did not have any intentions of buying a motorcycle, let alone a Harley Davidson for that matter.

“It was a spur of the moment thing. I came across a lump sum money. ‘What shall we do with this? Let’s buy a bike.’ I did not have Harley in my mind as a brand.”

And now, after six years he regrets that decision.

“I am not a *Harleyci*, I am a biker... I would not buy this bike today. If I had the right mind then I would have bought a Japanese bike.”

He maintains that he has bought his Harley Davidson because ‘it is a very beautiful machine, it is like an heirloom.’ When enquired as to what his bike would be if it were a living thing, Ahmet characterized his bike as a lazy and ponderous man. When probed further he maintained that it would be an American man, patriotic and religious. His bike would be a single man without any children, as he would have commitment issues. This lack of commitment also reflects on his bike’s work life as Ahmet maintained that he would not have a stable job, riding his bike day and night working at temporary jobs to fill the tank. It can be seen from these characterizations of his Harley Davidson by Ahmet that his views are formed in accordance with the believed level images of the brand in the United States. Harley Davidson is defined as a macho, America-loving, freedom-

seeking person (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Although Ahmet admits that he does not know much about the Harley Davidson culture abroad he argues that

“When we look abroad, *Harleyci* is the person whose life goes by on the bike, who lives according to its philosophy. In Turkey, from what I heard, people load their bikes on trucks from Istanbul and Ankara; they ship them to Antalya and they tour around the city there. No that is not it.”

Therefore, Ahmet’s views on the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey are also shaped by a believed level hearsay. Although he does not have a lived level experience with the brand community here he nonetheless has constructed a view about the community from what he has heard through others and through the media.

“HOG, according to me, is a group of men in andropause coming together to entertain themselves. Nothing else [in English]. This is only in Turkey in my view.”

Ahmet, as a negative case within my informants, provides very important insights as to the results of this research. On the lived level, Ahmet does not have any emotional attachment to his Harley Davidson. Among the categorizations of the Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey only Hopeless Cowboys sub-subcommunity had an emotional attachment to the brand per se, which is based on the brand story that has been ascribed through the Harley Davidson Company and various intermediaries like mass media and popular culture. They are the only ones that desire to be the ‘real Harley Davidson’ riders. Even though they have this emotional bond with the brand through the brand stories this is an imaginary

bond that is not reflected in their everyday lives as they were not only not cowboys but also hopeless to become one. Hopeless Cowboys, just like the other respondents are husbands, fathers, and prominent business people. Their lived level emotional attachments to the brand are, just like the other riders, based on their everyday mundane social realities. There were people among my interviewees, just like Ahmet, who have not considered buying a motorcycle, or who have not heard of Harley Davidson before. Yet, through acting out their own personal mythologies, through the personification of their mythological selves with the help of their Harley Davidson in their daily lives they have established an emotional attachment to the brand. They become *perfect father, wonder woman, bereaving husband, university student, high-society*, and so on.

However, Harley Davidson does not solve any personal mythological problems for Ahmet; he only uses the motorcycle as a transportation tool. Therefore, not only he does not get attached to the brand emotionally, he also regrets the decision for buying such an unwieldy and expensive machine. The fact that he does not have a personal lived level attachment to the brand does not prevent him from having symbolic characterization about his bike, but these symbolic portrayals come from a believed level imagination and corresponds to the images of Harley Davidson in the United States. Ahmet's beliefs about his bike and about the 'real' *Harleyci* image reveal the strength of believed level global travel of brands and brand communities. Although he does not have any first hand experience, again through believed level sources, he holds a homogeneous lived level image of Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey,

which is very different than the brand community abroad. He believes that Harley Davidson brand community in Turkey is nothing but a bunch of men in mid-life crisis. This is just the topic of a newspaper article that has come out before my interview with Ahmet,⁶ which I have mentioned only after his comments and he admitted to reading it.

My other informants all believe that they are one and the same spiritually with other Harley Davidson riders around the world as they refer to the mythological selves they assume through Harley Davidson. These personal mythologies essentially refer to universal notions of success, independence, and youth, and create a bond between universal Harley Davidson community members. As Ahmet does not have a personal mythological self that he acts out through the Harley Davidson brand he does not hold such a belief, on the contrary he believes that Harley riders in Turkey comprise a very different brand community than the ‘real’ one abroad. This belief, although being true but for very different reasons that are grounded in local Harley Davidson riders’ meanings and experiences in their daily social lives, is based on the contradictions he supposes between the global and local believed level images of Harley Davidson brand community.

This negative case of Ahmet shows the importance of lived level experiences of consumers with Harley Davidson in forming a relationship with the brand and the users of the same brand both locally and universally. Other than

⁶ “Easy Rider Andropoz Giridi,” *Hurriyet*, 03.08.2003.

Ahmet, all my respondents establish a strong emotional attachment to their Harley Davidson motorcycles as in their everyday mundane lives the brand helps them to play the role of their mythological selves. The local communal relationships are established or rejected base on the lived level experiences as well. Communities are not formed because they use the same brand, but because some people feel closer to each other and actively decide to be friends. On a global basis the believed level communal relationship structures are also formed through the lived level experiences. As Ahmet does not have a mythological problem solved by Harley Davidson, he also does not believe that there is a universal brand community; on the contrary he thinks that the Harley Davidson brand community abroad is very different than the one in Turkey. However, my other respondents believe that they are one and the same universally as they refer to the mythological constructs of independence, youth, and success they mimic through their everyday use of the brand. This belief that there is a one big happy global family comprised of independent, young at heart, successful individuals is also propagated by the Company and the media and HOG, through which the Harley Davidson brand community travels globally on a believed level.

In the next chapter I will discuss the implications of these lived and believed level analyses of my data in order to portray their significance in a theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE: A Theoretical Discussion of the Findings and Contributions

The lived and believed level analyses of the data portrayed that consumers form strong emotional relationships with the brand only within their everyday mundane realities through the acting out of their personal mythologies. In this context, the communal relationships form between consumers who feel close to each other with regard to social, cultural, and personal values, and a uniform brand community which brings consumers together just because they consume the same brand does not exist on a lived level. However, on a believed level consumers suppose the existence of and their belonging to a global brand community. This supposition enables the international travel of the brand community, together with the help of brand stories, but only on a believed level. The findings of this research contributes to the consumer culture theory by introducing the notion of personal mythologies as a brand relationship quality; by explaining the ways in which brand communities travel globally in the

consumers' minds; and by challenging the brand community concept as a uniform community formed around a brand where consumers' act according to a set of structured relationship conducts.

5.1 A Personal Mythological Brand Relationship Quality

Relationship metaphor is considered to be a very appealing and important concept for understanding brand loyalties and consumer's interactions with brands, yet there are many questions remain unanswered 'regarding the types of relationships consumers may form with brands, the nature and quality of these various engagement forms, and the processes whereby such relationships evolve and develop over time' (Fournier 2005: 343). My research contributes to the literature on brand relationship theory by answering these questions through the introduction of the personal mythologies construct.

I find that personal mythologies are specific and idiosyncratic stories, which emanate from consumers' everyday mundane social realities that are maintained to resolve essential problems regarding these everyday realities. Here, mundane everyday social realities refer to the ordinary, rather than the extraordinary, the usual rather than the unusual, the routine and the common in a person's daily existence. One person's mundane can be for another person unexpected or bizarre. In other words, mundane everyday realities depend on the person and his/her everyday social life. A personal mythology may be directed to

resolve ongoing and ordinary personal psychological issues, family issues, work related problems, and social relationship concerns that emanate from consumers' own daily mundane realities. Through these mythological stories consumers can resolve their various anxieties by escaping into their mythological selves. The mythological selves of individuals are although being imaginary, they are also more ideal than all their possible selves they may assume in their everyday lives. An individual may be a loving father, devoted husband, and a hard working businessmen and still hold on to a mythological self of *absentee father and boss*, who escapes into the story of the independent and unbounded self, which is within his everyday life mythological and fantastical. Someone who has lost a loved one can try and live the memory through personifying a *bereaving* mythological self who refuses to move on.

Therefore, these personal mythologies are very crucial for consumers in their mundane social realities. I find that my informants personify their mythological selves by the help of the meanings they ascribe to their experiences with the brand as they incorporate it in their daily lives. This crucial role the brand plays in consumers' realization of their personal mythologies lead to the formation of strong emotional attachments with the brand and hence, the brand becomes an active partner of a loyal relationship.

Consumers in the course of their everyday lives construct all kinds of intimate and unique relationships with the brands they consume (Mazzarella 2003) and I find that one such relationship quality is established as the brand helps

the consumer to act out the personal mythology s/he so dearly holds. Through this important ability of the brand in the simulation of the mythological self by the consumer a strong and emotional bond is established and brand becomes an intrinsic partner in consumers routine lived existence.

The personal mythologies of my informants, although being specific and idiosyncratic, also refer to more universal categories, such as independence, youth, and success. Therefore, brands that claim an ability to tap into these universal constructs through their brand stories composed in global as well as local socio-cultural contexts have a potential for being an active partner in a personal mythological relationship with consumers. Harley Davidson is just an example of a brand that has achieved the facilitation of such a relationship. However, a brand needs not to be an expensive, luxury, or social status product for establishing this brand relationship quality. Coca-Cola, for example aims to achieve such a brand story by their campaign where individuals who resist the social structure in their everyday lives are applauded by their peers. Cumhuriyet, a Turkish national newspaper, tries to offer their readers the mythological self of the secular hero who fights against radical Islamic threats. These brands try to establish their offerings as an active partner for consumers to act out their personal mythologies. Consumers form a loyal relationship with the brand as they together live the mythology. One becomes the independent, young at heart, successful individual riding his Harley Davidson; the rebellious, non-conformist maverick as he drinks a bottle of Coca-Cola; and a patriotic, secular hero while he reads his Cumhuriyet. These brands use the symbolic power of their offerings to

draw on the personal mythologies of consumers in order to implicate consumers to establish strong brand relationships.

Personal mythology metaphor, with its rather fantastical power of offering consumers a more ideal self than their possible selves, is therefore an important concept for marketers as they are constantly trying to find ways in which to establish their brands as essential and crucial relationship partners of consumers in their everyday lives. It also contributes to the consumer culture theory research by offering an explanation of why and how consumers form emotional bonds with certain brands in the dyadic consumer-brand relationship process.

5.2 Global Brand Community Travel

The personal mythology metaphor is also critical in understanding the multifaceted brand community relationship framework, which includes, in addition to the dyadic consumer-brand relationships, other consumers and various intermediaries as part of the relationship process. I find that the acting out of personal mythologies facilitates the establishment of strong emotional relationships between brands and my informants on an everyday lived level. Although these personal mythologies are idiosyncratic and specific to each and every individual as they emanate from their own daily social realities, these individuals are also a part and parcel of a larger culture. Culture, on the other hand, is seen as a socially distributed system of models, where the mental models,

or the personal mythologies if you will, are internalized by individuals from shared public models that are a part and parcel of social environments (Shore, 2002). This view of culture as a distributed system of models maintains that there can be no absolute boundaries between cultural communities. Urry (2002) explains this boundary-less global complexity through mobility of not only flows but also of networked relationships. In Actor Network Theory, Bruno Latour (2005) advances the views on the mobility of networked relationships through hybridity, which involves grey zones of creolization, conflict, and negation, as well as the usual suspects of globalization. These views on global culture, therefore, redefine the cosmopolitan reality as the multiple ways in which the local is redefined through interactions with the global, where the constitution of the social world is articulated through cultural models (Delanty 2006).

Looking through such a cultural theoretical lens, I can now place personal mythologies in a wider context where these mental models are formed within a system of cultural models in a cosmopolitan situation. The unique and special fantastic stories of my respondents are articulated in a system of cultural models and therefore, they also refer to more universal concepts as independence, youth, and success. As these consumers live out their own mythological selves through their brand, they also come to believe that consumers of the same brand around the world share similar experiences. This belief is in a way a source of legitimization of their ability to escape into their mythological selves. The belief that 'we are one and the same' rationalizes their fantastical selves through the supposition that everybody else also has the same routine. Therefore, my research

shows that personal mythologies, with their universal references, forge a bond with global consumers of the same brand enabling the international travel of brand community on this believed level. The travel of brand communities on a believed level is also catalyzed through the brand stories ascribed by the marketers, mass media, consumers, and cultural institutions. Harley Davidson's brand story of the 'one big happy family' is an example of this process.

My research furthers the critique of global branding paradigm by maintaining that similar to brands, brand communities also travel globally. However, this international travel of brand communities has more severe implications for the discussions over agency for the global consumer culture. Travel of global brands, with their symbolic powers of homogenization and fragmentation is widely criticized by consumer researchers with respect to the agency issues. Global brands are given the role of powerful mediators of not only the construction of consumers' self identities, but also the negotiation of interpersonal social relationships. In this sense, global branding paradigm is argued to be the powerful agent with respect to the consumer culture in a dialectic relationship on a discourses level (Holt 2002).

I argue that the global travel of brand communities on a believed level is a way in which marketers tilt the agency scale even more in their favor. Global branding literature maintains that the meanings of global brands are constructed through negotiations between the global branding paradigm and local consumer cultures (Holt 2002). These meanings may be adopted, appropriated, or rejected

by the consumers in different social, cultural, economical, and political contexts (e.g. Ger and Belk 1996; Miller 1998; Wilk 1995). The same process maybe acknowledged for the global travel of brand communities. My research also shows that meanings and experiences of the Harley Davidson brand community during its importation to Turkish market endured a negotiation process. However, there is a fundamental difference between the travel of global brands and brand communities. Whereas brands are the symbolic intermediaries used by consumers to create and maintain social relationships, global brand communities offer a set of structured relationships to their members. That is to say, through the marketing of brand communities internationally, marketers replace the intermediary role of brands and thus consumers' ability to manipulate their symbolic meanings when they are negotiating their social relationships, with pre-packaged relationship constructs. Marketing of pre-packaged relationships means that by means of global brand communities the market is now entering the one realm that is said to be liberating for the consumer in the hegemonic and chaotic risk society. Kotler (1999), in his book where he talks about marketing as a way in which to create, win, and dominate markets, maintains that brand communities overlay an experience that speak louder than headlines and slogans, and will push marketing towards the collectively experiential for surviving (for companies) in this new consumer society. This view of global brand communities is taking Holt's (2002) pessimistic views of consumer as never escaping from the market a step forward as it implies that the branding paradigm strips the consumer culture from the one weapon of agency left in its arson for playing with the meanings of brands. Some social relationships in this sense are not to be created and nurtured by the

consumers but rather established and marketed globally by the marketer. The global brand community on a believed level, much like the hegemonic global brandscape of Thompson and Arsel (2004), presents a powerful cultural model through which individual consumers construct their local social realities. However, unlike the brandscape, which is a powerful intermediary for consumers as they negotiate their social relationships, the brand community as a hegemonic cultural model that travels across borders internationally implies a more powerful influence as it cuts off the intermediary and instead offers structured sets of relationship constructs pre-packaged and ready to use. Therefore, the global travel of brand community as a hegemonic cultural model undermines the agency of the consumer even more so than the global brand.

However this view, just like Holt's (2002), is a grave underestimation of local lived level experiences of consumers. Global brand communities do travel internationally, but only on a believed level, where consumers imagine that they are the member of a global, uniform, homogenized community of mythological selves. This seems to be establishing the marketer as the locus of agency, at least on a believed level. My informants believe that there is a universal all-encompassing brand community, and that they can belong instantly wherever they go through the established pre-packaged set of relationship structures that bind them together. Yet, these beliefs are not realized even within the local brand community as I find that on a mundane, everyday, and lived level consumers' experiences about the brand community is very different.

5.3 Multilayered Brand Community in Everyday Life

My research shows that on a lived level there is no one homogeneous brand community that shares a consciousness of kind, with mutual traditions and rituals, and a sense of moral responsibility to the community as a whole in the Turkish context as a transitional society, where traditional values coexist together with the more recent global consumer culture ethos. This is a direct challenge to the brand community concept defined as a non-geographically bound group of consumers whose actions are based on a structured set of relationships, as the lived brand community in Turkey, unlike the believed global community, is a very heterogeneous community, which is bounded by the socio-cultural context it is embedded in, and with re-traditional communal characteristics only visible within the small fractions of the community.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) maintain that brand communities represent an important turn as it implies similarities to traditional communities that consumer culture has long been accused of destroying. However, I find that the similarities that they cite; the consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility, does not hold for a brand community in a qualitatively different socio-cultural context than United States in particular and the West in general. Brand community, as a believed level universal community, is comprised of subcommunities and sub-subcommunities that further dissolve into fractions of traditional communal networks on the lived level. These sub and sub-subcommunities are formed according to the meanings ascribed to the brand by

the consumers in their everyday lives; for what purposes they use the brand and how. These groups within the brand community not only do not have a shared sense of belonging but they also sometimes despise each other; they not only do not have similar rituals and traditions, but also consider others' practices as the 'wrong way;' they not only do not feel a moral obligation towards the whole community, but also accuse other groups for being immoral.

Therefore, a brand community with markers of a traditional community only exists on a believed level and it travels internationally on this believed level. This argument supports the definition of brand community as a 'specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand' and grant agency to the marketer, but only on a believed level (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001: 412). However, on the lived level, where experiences of consumers in their daily social contexts reign, I find that a uniform community formed around a brand does not exist. In a rather communal society like Turkey (e.g. Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç 2000; Ger and Belk 1990) my informants base their communal relationships on a compatibility of social, personal, and cultural values, rather than the consumption of the same brand as in the West reported by the extant brand community literature. According to the research at hand the brand only facilitates the meeting of consumers and then the conventional social relationship processes take control as the consumers become closer with others whom they feel compatible with. Consumers form what I call re-traditional communal relationships through non-brand related activities like organizing dinners, holidays, birthday and wedding

anniversary parties, they go to home visits and socialize together with families. These communities show characteristics of traditional communities that Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) ascribe for the brand communities in the West. They have a very acute sense of belonging, they share rituals and traditions in their daily lives, and hold strong moral obligations towards their community, but in forming these relationships the locus of agency is the consumer rather than the marketer.

These arguments show the importance of lived level experiences in consumers' mundane existence grounded in different local socio-cultural contexts. I will again refer to cultural models literature in order to portray the interconnectedness of the believed level and lived level meanings and practices of consumers. In the previous section I have explained how private idiosyncratic personal mythologies, as mental models are embedded in more public cultural models, and also how global brand communities travel internationally on a believed level as they provide powerful cultural models for consumers around the world. Looking at the global brand community travel only from a believed level would only lead to cultural globalization, where the hegemonic believed global brand community constructs would dictate the social relationships of consumers in every locality.

However, my research shows that on the lived level consumers' relationships within a brand community show considerable varieties. Although consumers believe that there are structured sets of social relationships which bind them together, their lived experiences are not based on these structures but rather

on their own everyday realities. In order to understand the bigger picture, one should try to focus on the relationship between the believed and lived level processes. The problem with cultural models literature is its tendency to reify cultural values for lived experiences. However, cultural values and subjective experiences are in constant communication with each other (Gjerde 2004). I will use the word cultural concerns, like Barth (1993), instead of cultural values in order to explicate this relationship. According to Barth (1993) concerns are themes that summarize recurring life experiences. People are generally cognizant of cultural concerns and they live by these concerns which influence how they think, feel, and act. However, there is a great deal of subjective variation in how these concerns are interpreted and acted upon in daily life. That is to say concerns may be shared but their solutions can be very different (Gjerde 2004). Therefore, the brand community can travel on a believed level as a powerful cultural model to the extent that it refers to shared cultural concerns. Yet, these concerns are dealt with very different approaches by consumers in different everyday lived experiences. That is to say, even though brand communities offer belonging for global consumers with shared cultural concerns, lived level community relationships are still formed through personal agency of the conscious consumers. I argue that the conscious consumer here is a mediator between global cultural concerns and subjective local realities and that instead of a dialectic relationship there is dialogic relationship between the believed and lived level meanings and experiences of consumers.

Although Holt's (2002) view on the dialectic relationship between the branding paradigm and the consumer culture provides insights on the macro influences of the market over consumers in a globalized world, it nevertheless presents a myopic rendering that glosses over the local lived experiences of consumers. This research shows that although there is a homogeneous, all-encompassing brand community that travel internationally does exist on a believed level in the consumers' minds, it also portrays consumers as active agents in creating, maintaining, and negotiating communal relationships in their routine social-cultural realities. Whereas the believed level analysis of this research concludes that marketers can exploit the global travel of brand communities as a very efficient, effective, inexpensive, and unobtrusive tool to market their products internationally by emphasizing the supposition of consumers that they will be belonging to a one big happy family through the consumption of the brand; the lived level analysis reveals that consumers are still active participants in forming meaningful brand consumer relationships as well as their own communal networks based on their mundane everyday lives.

This research has set to provide a better understanding of the brand community concept in a global context as being experienced in consumers' mundane social lives. Brand communities do travel internationally on a believed level, functioning as a strong cultural model. The idea that there is a universal community, of which one can belong to just through the consumption of a brand, presents a crucial marketing opportunity for companies as it is argued that meaning in life in today's contemporary world does not reside in individual

identity but in meaningful relationships (Miller 2001). Brand communities offer global consumers these meaningful relationships pre-packaged and ready to use. Together with the brand stories constructed by the marketer, consumers, mass media, and popular culture industries, global brand communities aid the marketing of brands in international markets. Although brand communities exist in the consumers' minds as a uniform group of like-minded individuals, it does not present itself as such on a lived level where consumer experiences break up the community into sub-sub communities. Re-traditional communal relationships, as well as consumer-brand relationships are formed through processes within daily social realities of consumers. Re-traditional communal relationships are formed not because consumers are using the same brand, but only because they share similar values, life styles, and familial ties. Consumers, as they integrate the brand in their daily lives and start using the brand for the purposes of acting out their personal mythologies, form strong emotional bonds with the brand. The ability of the brand in the consumers' personification of their mythological selves also strengthens the belief that there is a universal global community of 'a one big happy family' among the consumers of the brand. This is not only a legitimization on the part of consumers for their fantastical identities, but also a proliferation of the believed level international travel of brand community. Therefore the believed and lived level processes present a continuous dialogic model of brand community meanings and experiences rather than a dialectic one in both a global as well as a local context.

5.4 Managerial Implications

Today, marketing environment is dominated by a fierce race between corporations for creating and sustaining a competitive advantage on the basis of their offerings to consumers. Increasingly the successful marketing efforts are focused not only on the product, but also on the experience consumption of the product. The experience consumption of a product can be strategically managed through creating and maintaining customer-centered brand relationships (McAlexander et al. 2002). Brand communities, in this respect, offer brand managers an inexpensive and unobtrusive opportunity to establish such relationships with their customers. This research supports the importance of building a brand community for marketing purposes. As the general manager and the CEO of Harley Davidson Turkey maintain, thanks to the Harley Davidson brand community, they did not have a marketing budget until last year, for the brand community does everything for them from publishing a magazine, to organizing parties, from appearing in newspapers to parading in high streets.

Furthermore, this research provides an important implication for brand managers by maintaining that brand communities do travel internationally and that brand community travel across borders can be an invaluable source of competitive advantage for market development. A global brand community offers consumers to be a part and parcel of a worldwide community. This sense of belonging, even on a believed level, is not only a source for long term brand loyalty, but also an international marketing opportunity that provides an incentive

for potential consumers. Brand managers that can build and maintain a brand community with reference to relatively global cultural concerns can establish their brand as an integral element of a cultural model through which consumers guide their attitudes and behaviors.

Although global brand community management calls for a need to emphasize relatively universal believed level cultural referents, this research also shows that the lived level meanings and experiences of consumers should not be disregarded. Brand communities do travel but their meanings and experiences may change, similar to global brands. Local social, cultural, economic, and political contexts do play a part in the travel of brand communities as portrayed for example by the founding of the Harley Owners Foundation in Turkey. Therefore, this research establishes the importance of lived level social realities as well as the believed level discourses for brand managers in order to fully utilize the value of a brand community. Brand community travel on a believed level maybe the first step in winning customer base for companies but lived level experiences of consumers is the Holy Grail of maintaining the brand community as a competitive advantage.

On this lived level, there are two important implications of this research for marketing purposes. First one is related with the brand consumer relationships. The personal mythology metaphor I have introduced is a relationship quality that managers can utilize for building and maintaining long term customer centered brand loyalty. Personal mythologies are idiosyncratic and specific stories that

consumers hold on to in order to make sense of their daily mundane social realities. These private mythologies are embedded in more public cultural concerns. Brands that can tap into these cultural concerns offer consumers a way in which they can act out their personal mythologies and hence can forge strong brand consumer relationships.

The second lived level implication of his research for marketing purposes is the fact that a brand community may not be a homogeneous entity. On a lived level a brand community maybe dissolved into subcommunities with different meanings, experiences, rituals, and practices. Brand managers, therefore, should try and understand the specific needs and desires of these different subcommunities and cater for these diversities as well in order not to alienate certain customer groups.

Brand communities offer managers a great potential for building long term consumer centered brand loyalty, which is argued to be one of the most important asset for companies in order to survive in today's competitive marketing environment. This research shows that brand communities can be built and maintained for establishing the brand as an integral part of consumers in their daily lives; for functioning as a cultural model on a local as well as global basis; and for marketing communication purposes in an effective and efficient manner.

5.4 Further Thoughts: *Do Brands Cause Trouble?*

The relationship between the branding paradigm and the consumer culture cannot be fully understood without looking at the everyday lived level mundane practices of consumers in local socio-cultural contexts. Holt (2002) offers a dialectic model of branding and consumer culture, where there is essentially a power struggle between the two. This may be the case when one looks at the countercultural movement of consumer resistance. Holt's (2002) arguments on the fact that even the revolutionary consumers are acting within the branding paradigm is an important insight, however it misses the fact that this is a marginal movement practiced by a small fraction of the global community and the larger society does not try to be liberated from the market forces, but rather try to create meaning within. This is not necessarily a dialectic moment.

The present research shows that my respondents, as post/re-modern consumers, do not engage in a dialectic relationship with the brand they use; they do not seek out a power struggle over meaning systems; instead they form a dialogic relationship where they create their own meanings in their everyday lived experiences and succumb to the global brand community structures only on a believed level as they legitimize their mythological selves and imagine a belonging in a group of like-minded fantastical selves. These dialogic relationships consumers form with brands through their lived personal mythologies are among the reflexive actions of the actor entangled in a network of relationships, trying to get by in a risk society (Latour 2003, Beck 1992). The

post/re-modern consumers, with their heightened awareness that mastery and control over actions is impossible, accept that they are living in a web of quasi-objects⁷ and lucid symbols and forged relationships and produce or use these to negotiate their place in these networks. They do not try to resist or be liberated from these networks, instead, they acknowledge them. Brands, therefore, do not cause trouble for consumers; on the contrary they engage in a dialogic relationship with consumers within these everyday lived level actions.

The trouble is caused by the believed level discourses created by what Holt (2002) calls the branding paradigms. These branding paradigms according to Holt (2002) evolve from a dialectical tension with the consumer culture, from a modern through a postmodern to a post postmodern system. However, what I conclude from my research is that the branding paradigm is still operating with a very much modern agenda through the marketing of pre-structured set of relationships by the believed level travel of global brand communities.

As the brand community offers a mythical identity to its members, and as the members view all other members as basically the same as they are, there exists a pre-defined universal brand community member profile in the consumers' minds as well as a set of a priori relationship conducts. Brand communities are geographically unbound, and they travel internationally on a believed level. This may seem a natural extension of the fact that brands also do travel internationally. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two, whereas the latter is

⁷ Askegaard (2006) defines global brands as quasi-objects as well by maintaining that once the brands were symbolic extensions of products, but today products are becoming the material extension of global brands.

a physical commodity or at least an offering of a commodity (in the service sector), the former is nothing but a relational experience. It is argued that through consuming, social relationships are formed and managed. What happens then if the relationships themselves are prepackaged and marketed internationally? I argue that international marketing, by shifting the focus from the self to the social, from the commodity to the experience, and from the local to the global, is trying to create a universal homogeneous consumer culture at the believed level through which it will enable the consumption of various systems of objects, and that creating and managing brand communities provide a powerful tool for this end.

This is a very modernist project and this is the level where the modernist branding paradigm causes trouble for the post/re-modern consumer culture. Although the consumers with their post/re-modern understanding of their socio-cultural life-worlds act idiosyncratically based on their own personal mythologies, trying to build a dialogic relationship with the branding paradigm; the modernist project of international branding paradigm only views these idiosyncrasies as side-effects that are to be subjugated through a dialectic relationship. I argue that this modernist perseverance of branding paradigm which always and already views the relationship with the consumer culture as a dialectic one, rather than what it should be; dialogic, is a problem for contemporary consumer culture. Latour (2003) explains so aptly the modernist perseverance, which also manifests itself in the branding paradigm trying to conquer the consumer culture. Advocates of the modernist branding paradigm deem that “side-effects are just that: side-effects, and that the grand project of modernity will soon take care of them to

resume its straight march forward. It is very difficult to prove that side-effects are so numerous that their proliferation has eaten up projects to the point where the projects themselves have been transformed beyond recognition” (Latour 2003: 38). This is a beautiful explanation of the network of the contemporary consumer culture. The problem does not reside with the consumer culture where conscious actors acknowledge and struggle within the market system, using brands to forge relationships with brands, with other actors, or with their mythical and everyday selves on a lived level. The problem resides with the dialectic pursuit of modernist branding paradigm still trying to further the project on a more ideological, discourses, believed level, which legitimates the idiosyncratic actions as side-effects to be subjugated. Such view of the relationship as a dialectic pursue of power causes trouble for the consumer culture. Consumers may be powerful agents in their local lived experiences, yet the global branding paradigm with mass media, popular culture industries, and the market at its side is much more powerful force on a believed level. The trouble for the local consumer cultures of the world can be visualized as the believed level global branding paradigm hanging over the lived level local experiences like the Damocles’ Sword. This can only be solved if and only if the branding paradigm shakes off the modernist cape which makes it blind to the fact that these side-effects are the social, cultural, economical, ecological realities of actors’ life-worlds. They are not to be conquered, but rather to be experienced. In order for the relationship between the branding paradigm and consumer culture to be truly dialogic the branding paradigm needs to acknowledge the post/re-modern situation, the entangled network of side-effects, and become an acknowledged actor in this network.

I will leave the reader with a final note on the relationship between the consumer culture and the branding paradigm. The relationship may be viewed as a dialectic model where the branding paradigm is represented as the hegemonic and dominant agent if the consumer is deemed to be trying to liberate from the market forces of contemporary global society (Holt 2002). However, if the consumer is accepted to be this acknowledged post/re-modern actor who not only does not try to escape but rather embraces the system of meanings embedded in brands as a way of making sense of its existence in a risk society, then the model can be restructured as a dialogic one. In this dialogic model global believed level discourses and local lived level experiences will always and already be walking hand in hand in the process of creating meaning systems of global common differences. Branding paradigm may be a hegemonic force in the dissemination of global believed level discourses, but consumers have the dominance in their local lived level experiences as de-alienating agents of these discourses within their mundane social realities (Miller 1995).

Contemporary consumer culture may be defined as a way of life in which individuals communicate and negotiate their differences and associations through the consumption of global brands, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. As consumption may be a better way of relating between peoples of the world than traditional structures of identity and social relations, as we have been experiencing how religion, ethnicity, and politics fail in creating a peaceful world on an everyday basis. However, the potential of consumption as a better structure of

social relationships cannot be realized through a dialectic struggle between the market and the consumer, just as it did not work with organized religion and international politics, which view idiosyncratic lived level experiences of peoples around the world nothing but side-effects that need to be conquered.

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APPENDIX A: Consumer Side Interview Guide

- Kaç yıldır motorsiklet kullanıyorsunuz? Kaç yıldır Harley Davidson kullanıyorsunuz/HOG'a üyesiniz? Aktivitelere toplantılara ne sıklıkta katılıyorsunuz? Harleyci dergisine üye misiniz/ okuyor musunuz? HOG Internet sayfasını kullanıyor musunuz? Hangi amaçlarla?
- Harley Davidson markasını ilk nasıl duydunuz? Harley' e olan ilginiz ilk nasıl başladı?
- HOG' u ilk ne zaman duydunuz? Katılmadan önce hakkında ne bilginiz vardı?
- Harley-Davidson deyince aklınıza ne geliyor?
- Harley-Davidson markası deyince aklınıza ne geliyor?
- Motorsiklet deyince ilk aklınıza gelen nedir?
- Harley-Davidson motorsiklet deyince ilk aklınıza gelen nedir?
- Harley-Davidson motorsikletin anlamı sizin için nedir?
- Motorsikletiniz canlı bir varlık olsa nasıl bir varlık olurdu? Motorsikletiniz bir insan olsa nasıl biri olurdu? Hangi ülkeden? Dini ne? Oruç tutar mı? Milliyetçi mi? Amerika hakkında ne düşünüyor? Irak savaşı hakkında ne düşünüyor? Erkek mi kadın mı? Evli mi, çocuklu mu? Nasıl bir anne/baba? Nasıl bir işte çalışıyor? Patron mu, işçi mi? Nasıl bir patron/işçi?
- Kendi motorunuz sizin için ne anlam ifade ediyor?
- Sizce başkaları sizin motorunuz hakkında ne düşünüyor? (aile, arkadaşlar, çalışanlar, sokaktan geçenler, vs.)
- Harleyci olmak sizce ne demek?
- Her Harley kullanan Harleyci olabilir mi?
- Harley bir hayat felsefesi olabilir mi?
- Harley-Davidson kullanmak hayatınıza ne gibi değişiklikler getirdi?
- HOG sizin için ne anlam ifade ediyor?
- HOG'un amacı nedir?

- HOG'un aktivitelerine katılıyor musunuz?
 - Katılıyorsa – Ne sebeple? Hangi aktivitelere? Bu aktivitelerde neler yapılıyor?
 - Katılmıyorsa – Ne sebeple? Ne tür aktiviteler olsa katılırdınız?
- HOG üyeleri ile daha önceden tanışıyor muydunuz?
- Harleyinizi kullanırken yanınızda sizinle birlikte kimi görmek istersiniz?
- Harleyinizi kullanırken yanınızda kimi görmek istemezsiniz? Ya da HOG'un içinde HOG'a uymayan insanlar var mı?
- HOG üyeleri ile HOG aktiviteleri haricinde biraraya geliyor musunuz? Kimlerle, nerede, neden, vs. Kimlerle buluşmuyorsunuz?
- HOG haricinde başka gruplara üye misiniz? Hangi? Benzerlikler/Farklılıklar?
- Harley-Davidson kıyafetleri sizin için ne anlam ifade ediyor?
- Harley-Davidson aksesuarları sizin için ne anlam ifade ediyor?
- Harley giyim kuşamları kullanıyor musunuz?
- Hem motor kullanırken hem de günlük hayatta bu ürünler ne anlam ifade ediyor?
- Harley kıyafet ve aksesuarları kullanan kişiler hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?
- HOG'un diğer gruplardan (masonluk, iş arkadaşları, okul arkadaşları, vs.) farklılıkları/benzerlikleri nelerdir?
- HOG'u birarada tutan şey nedir?
- HOG olmadan Harleyci olunabilir mi?
- HOG gibi bir gruba ait olmak için mi Harley aldınız? Ya da HOG'a ait olacak olmak Harley almanız için bir etken miydi?
- Harley markasının Türkiye'deki anlamları yurt dışındakilerle aynı mı?
- HOG Türkiye diğer HOG chapterlarıyla ne gibi farklılıklar/benzerlikler gösteriyor?

APPENDIX B: Marketer Side Interview Guide

- Harley-Davidson deyince müşterinizin aklına ne geliyor?
- Harley-Davidson markası deyince müşterinizin aklına ne gelir?
- Motorsiklet deyince aklınıza ilk gelen nedir?
- Harley motorsiklet deyince aklınıza ilk gelen nedir?
- Harley-Davidson motorsiklet müşterileriniz için ne anlama ifade ediyor?
- Sizce nasıl bir insan Harley kullanır?
- Müşterileriniz genelde kimler? Sosyo-ekonomik durumları, kültürel durumları, motorsiklet ilgileri, hayata bakışları, vs.
- Harley-Davidson motorsikletin sahip olmayanlar için ne gibi anlamlar ifade ettiğini düşünüyorsunuz? Gelip almak isteyenler/alanlara almodan önce/ ya da tamamen sokaktaki insan.
- Harleyci deyince aklınıza ne geliyor? Müşterileriniz ne düşünüyor?
- Her Harley'i olan Harleyci olabilir mi? Müşterileriniz ne düşünüyor?
- Harley bir yaşam felsefesi olabilir mi?
- HOG sizin için ne anlam ifade ediyor?
- HOG'un amacı nedir?
- HOG'un diğer gruplara olan farklılık/benzerlikleri nelerdir?
- HOG'u birarada tutan şey nedir?
- HOG'un üyelerine getirileri nedir? Size getirileri nedir? Negatif yönleri?
- HOG aktivitelerine katılıyor musunuz?
- HOG aktiviteleri sizin için ne anlam ifade ediyor?
- HOG aktivitelerinin pazarlamaya katkıları nedir?
- HOG aktivitelerinin düzenlenmesindeki rolünüz nedir?
- Sizce HOG olmadan Harleyci olunabilir mi?

- Harley-Davidson'ın pazarlama stratejisi nedir? Ürünlerinizin tanıtımını nasıl yapıyorsunuz? Nasıl reklam yapıyorsunuz?
- Müşterilerinizi nasıl ikna ediyorsunuz?